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Neo-Victorian Novels of Spectacle: Mapping Gendered Spaces in the City

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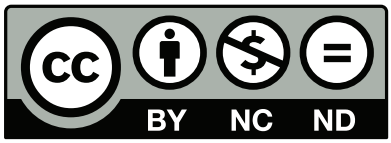

Resumen

El presente trabajo pretende acometer el estudio del género y el espacio en la novela neo-victoriana, mediante el análisis del proceso de "spatialising of identities", es decir, la construcción de la identidad de género a través del uso y naturaleza de espacios y lugares. En lo que concierne al proceso de "spatialising of identities", se entiende que existe un solapamiento del género y del espacio y que son dos categorías de creación social, en relación con la subjetividad. La geógrafa y científica social feminista Doreen Massey sostiene lo siguiente: "[t]he intersections and mutual influences of 'geography' and 'gender' are deep and multifarious. Each is, in profound ways, implicated in the construction of the other . . . " (177). Se debe entender el espacio y el género como categorías de creación y de actuación social, según las teorías de Judith Butler, quien concibe el género como performativo:[1] "[c]onsider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190). Butler mantiene que la identidad de género no es una expresión de un núcleo interior del individuo que revela quiénes somos, sino que, mediante actos sociales se produce el género, que es fluido y transferible. Esto sitúa a la identidad fuera de un marco propiamente heterosexual y al margen de la división binaria entre masculino y femenino por lo que los presupuestos de Butler han sido fundamentales para la teoría *queer*.[2]

[1] La palabra "performativa" es una versión española de la terminología inglesa para describir lo a que se refiere a *performative* en contraste a lo teatral. La diferencia consiste en que mientras la teatralidad es separable de la identidad, lo performativo constituye la dimensión social de la identidad de género del individuo y por lo tanto inseparable.

[2] La palabra *queer* se refiere a la identidad gay, lesbiana, bisexual y transexual. Como disciplina se utiliza la palabra inglesa *queer* en español.

Sin embargo, la sociedad está organizada según un modelo heteronormativo que condiciona nuestra participación y movilidad en diferentes espacios, en particular en lo que se refiere a la situación de la mujer. Resulta fundamental combinar el estudio del género con el del espacio como dos categorías que confluyen en su creación. Tal como resalta Shirley Ardener:

> [s]ocieties have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by intangible bridges with as much trepidation or exultation as on plank over a raging torrent. ("Ground Rules and Social Maps" 1-2)

La ideología entre lo público y lo privado como esferas propiamente divididas por el género es un claro ejemplo de cómo la sociedad crea su normas sobre roles sociales de género y el espacio. Este estudio comprende la idea del espacio de la ciudad como espectáculo y se centra en seis figuras femeninas representativas de la ciudad victoriana. Examina cómo la mujer del siglo XIX traspasaba las limitaciones impuestas por la ideología patriarcal de lo público/privado y cómo mediante diferentes estrategias lograban apropiar un espacio femenino en la esfera pública. De ahí, el título de la presente tesis doctoral "Neo-Victorian Novels of Spectacle: Mapping Gendered Spaces in the City".

El enfoque crítico que sustenta la presente Tesis Doctoral está compuesto por, en primer lugar, teorías de espacio y del género. Parto de las ideas elaboradas por el filósofo francés Henri Lefebvre (1901-91) en su obra transcendental *La Production de l'espace* (1974) en la que desafió la idea del espacio como una dimensión geométrica, a priori vacía, y de ese modo introdujo el concepto del espacio como una creación social.

Su perspectiva es interdisciplinar y resalta su relevancia para otras disciplinas como la literatura y el arte:

> we are after all talking about the setting we live in. Criticism of literature, art or drama is concerned with people and institutions . . . Vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere 'frame', after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure. (Lefebvre 92)

Sus ideas han sido claves para el desarrollo de otras disciplinas que engloban un carácter social del espacio, como sucedió con geografía feminista. Como ramificación de geografía humana, la geografía feminista es una disciplina joven que aplica teorías, métodos y críticas del feminismo al estudio del espacio geográfico, humano y social. Lefebvre propone que

> the spatial practice of a society is revealed through deciphering its space . . . [i]t embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks that link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure). (Lefebvre 38)

En *The Social Production of Space*, Lefebvre propone un modelo tripartito que consiste en tres dimensiones del espacio – percepción, concepción y vivencia – que viene a reflejar cómo el individuo interpreta y se apropia del espacio que hace su identidad.

La geografía feminista acoge las ideas expuestas arriba dando especial importancia a cuestiones que tratan cómo la organización espacial refleja y reafirma la posición social de la mujer. Entre ellas se encuentra la separación entre lo público y lo privado, que, al ser una estructura intrínsecamente patriarcal, se apoya en la asociación

entre la condición de mujer con el rol social. Esto implica que la estructura social del espacio condiciona la presencia y participación de la mujer. La geografía feminista presta atención a la consciencia femenina para averiguar cómo la mujer percibe su rol social, cómo ese rol contribuye a su identidad. Massey apunta que el espacio está condicionado por el género, asimismo, refleja y afecta a la interpretación de los roles de género y la producción social del mismo:

> the limitation of women's mobility in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things – limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other – have been crucially related. (179)

El tropo del teatro ofrece numerosas ventajas para interpretar el género como una construcción social, o performativo. Resulta un concepto útil pues permite analizar el carácter social inherente del espacio, el género y la subjetividad y las relaciones entre dichas categorías. Como lo designa Butler:

> [t]hat gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192-93)

De tal modo, el modelo elaborado por Lefebvre encaja a la perfección con el análisis de subjetividad femenina y su experiencia urbana, uno de los objetivos principales del presente estudio que se centra en la representación literaria de figuras femeninas urbanas en la época victoriana.

Una lectura de la construcción de identidad del género a través de la investigación sobre los espacios en la novela neo-victoriana debe realizarse también en conjunción con las condiciones socio-culturales de la mujer en el siglo XIX. Por consiguiente, el marco teórico combina teorías del espacio social y urbano y geografía feminista con corrientes feministas recientes del estudio socio-histórico de la mujer en la época victoriana, con el fin de interrogar la sostenibilidad de la división de esferas en público/privado como una ideología estrictamente aplicada en todos los niveles de la sociedad victoriana. Al contrario, tal como han demostrado críticos socio-históricos la dicotomía de lo público/privado era poroso, inestable y bajo constante presión social. El rol y el estatus socio-cultural de la mujer victoriana cambiaba paulatinamente a lo largo del siglo XIX, y tal como afirma Martha Vicinus, la mujer victoriana "even within the confines of Victorian life, all classes of women were being changed and were changing society" (Introduction xi). Vicinus por lo tanto sugiere que la esfera de la mujer no se limitaba a un ámbito doméstico designada para, como sostiene Sarah Stickney Ellis "to suffer and be still", sino que era "a widening sphere" (Vicinus, Introduction xi), es decir un ámbito en crecimiento.

Sin embargo, es preciso evitar la tentación de interpretar siempre la esfera pública como un terreno abierto a las mujeres o que brindaba posibilidades de encontrar un papel fuera de la normativa patriarcal. Hemos de reconocer que la vida cotidiana de la mujer estaba circunscrita por unas normas sociales estrictas. Janet Floyd afirma lo siguiente:

> The plotting of inside and outside, interior and exterior, private and public have been and remain matters of profound critical importance. These distinctions structure the imagination and experience of the world. We can scarcely think

about subjectivity, a social existence, or the disposition of power without inside and outside. But such terms are protean. (351)

Tal como apunta Floyd, lo público/privado así como sus correspondiente dicotomías masculino/femenino, exterior/interior, activo/pasivo etc. son condiciones necesarias para contextualizar la experiencia social de la mujer. En definitiva, esta Tesis Doctoral no niega ni contradice la existencia y validez de lo público/privado en el siglo XIX, sino que cambia el enfoque de exclusión a inclusión para averiguar cómo la mujer victoriana empleaba diferentes estrategias para adentrarse en la esfera pública y de qué forma esto contribuía a su identidad.

Es éste un aspecto que nos interesa particularmente desde el punto de vista feminista puesto que la nueva experiencia urbana el Londres del siglo XIX ofrecía a la mujer una oportunidad sin precedentes de realización personal fuera del hogar. Deborah Parsons afirma que tanto los espacios públicos como los privados formaban parte integrante de la creación de identidad de la mujer urbana y sostiene: "women developing her independence in the city was negotiating both her own *and* private space" (78). En este contexto, las figuras tratadas – la *flâneuse*, la filántropa, la prostituta, la mujer artista del *music hall*, el circo y el *freak show* – ofrecen una perspectiva nueva sobre la mujer victoriana, frente a la visión tradicional que la caracteriza como mujer confinada dentro del marco social impuesto por la normativa patriarcal.

La fascinación por la figura de la prostituta en la época victoriana se debe a que encarna la contradicción existente entre la respetabilidad y la doble moral de los valores victorianos. Resulta evidente que la prostituta es una figura pública liminal, tanto físicamente como sociológicamente dado que pertenecía al terreno público; era una mujer abiertamente sexual y tenía clientes de todos los niveles de la escala social de la

época. Su camino está entrelazado con otra mujer que se movía entre las zonas marginadas de Londres, la filántropa. Esa mujer de clase media alta ensanchó los deberes domésticos a la esfera pública mediante trabajo de caridad. Siendo polos opuestos de la escala social, esas dos figuras comparten una serie de características que las define como mujeres liminales y públicas que se podría encontrar en el panorama urbano. La figura de la *flâneuse* engloba la experiencia urbana femenina y al contrario de lo que ocurre sobre el debate sobre su existencia, el presente estudio ofrece una perspectiva innovadora sobre esta mujer caminante, ya que argumenta que se trata de una figura exclusivamente femenina frente a argumentos previos de que es simplemente una versión femenina del *flâneur*—el hombre que encarna la experiencia moderna de la ciudad en el siglo XIX. Como se ha mencionado antes, la presencia de la mujer en la esfera social requería una consciencia concreta, y en esa línea Deborah Epstein Nord explica que la presencia de la mujer en las calles:

> involves a consciousness of transgression and trespassing, of vexed sexuality, of the female body as commodity, of the unreliability of class boundaries, of the need for disguise or some form of incognito, and most importantly, of the ultimate unavoidability of the primacy of the male gaze and its power to objectify and eroticize. ("The Urban Peripatetic" 375)

La presente Tesis Doctoral ha sido estructurada en ocho capítulos, mencionados aquí y descritos por separado abajo. Tras la introducción en el capítulo 1, el capitulo dos "Geography of Spaces and Gender in Victorian Culture" desarrolla el marco teórico. Mientras en 2.1. trato a filósofos y pensadores críticos del espacio como Henri Lefebvre, Jürgen Habermas y Michel de Certeau, combinado con geografía feminista, en 2.2. examino la ciudad del siglo XIX, y el rol social de la mujer y lo público/privado. El capitulo 3, "Urban Catergories in Victorian London" se ocupa de diferentes

categorías urbanas en el Londres del siglo XIX y ha sido dividido en dos grupos de la esfera pública: las calles y el escenario. El cuarto capítulo consiste en un "State of the Art" para describir como el neo-victorianismo ha ido desarrollándose en una disciplina propia hasta empezar a distanciarse del postmodernismo durante la primera década del siglo XX. Las novelas arriba mencionadas han sido analizadas por separado y finalmente he presentado mis hallazgos en las conclusiones.

La selección de los títulos tratados en el capitulo de análisis responde, en primer lugar, a su pertinencia respecto al tema de la presente Tesis Doctoral; se han escogido aquéllos donde aparecen las seis figuras bajo consideración. El mundo del espectáculo del siglo XIX incluye tres artistas femeninas de tres espacios diferentes – *music-hall*, el circo y el *freak show* – en conjunto con las tres figuras que se pueden ver en el panorama urbano – la *flâneuse*, la prostituta y la filántropa –enfocado a la noción de la ciudad como espectáculo. Por lo tanto la combinación entre la crítica del espacio, la geografía feminista y el estudio socio-histórico resulta particularmente prominente para analizar "spatialising of identities" en la literatura neo-victoriana. Las novelas abarcan el neo-victorianismo desde sus orígenes hasta el presente con un título representativo del tema del presente trabajo: *Nights at the Circus* (1984) de Angela Carter, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) de Sarah Waters, *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) de Michel Faber y *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013) de Rosie Garland.

Como hemos desarrollado en el capitulo teórico, hay un solapamiento del género y el espacio en relación con la subjetividad, lo que se ve reflejado en las cuatro narrativas. Por esta razón estamos plenamente convencidos de la importancia de la noción de "spatialising of identity" como pauta para comentar los textos literarios tal como se comprueba en la presente Tesis. La idea de la identidad de género como "performativo" (*performative*) demuestra ser muy versátil, asi como, el tropo de la

teatralidad para la aproximación que se lleva a cabo en estas obras narrativas de los autores.

Carter adelanta el neo-victorianismo y el mundo del espectáculo como ambiente fructífero para tratar la identidad femenina asimismo y el género, no sólo como una producción social sino como performativo. Tanto genero, modo, ambiente y temas son aspectos que están presentes en las narrativas de Waters y Garland. Hemos constatado que el proceso de descubrimiento de la identidad lesbiana en *Tipping the Velvet* va unido a la formación teatral de la protagonista. En cambio, la narrativa de Garland se centra en la identidad liminal de la rarezas humanas (*freak performer*) que trabajan en el *freak show*. En el caso de Faber, la centralidad de las figuras femeninas poco convencionales – una prostituta y una filántropa proto-feminista – representan una perspectiva alternativa de la sociedad victoriana. El autor adapta el tropo de la teatralidad en su tratamiento de la vida urbana como espectáculo y juega con la curiosidad del lector y su afán por obtener una visión holística del siglo XIX. El conjunto de las obras responde al presente interés en la época victoriana y reescritura de la dicotomía del público/privado. Ese periodo histórico se distingue por la división de esferas entre lo público/privado, y las novelas neo-victorianas que nos ocupan demuestran cómo esa dicotomía es porosa, inestable y llena de vacios que se producen.

Es preciso destacar, en este sentido, que autoras que recurren a la novela histórica y más concretamente al mundo del espectáculo se centran en la fluidez y la permeabilidad de limites de categorías, de tal manera que categorías que son producciones sociales, sea el género, el espacio o la identidad confluyen. La gran mayoría de novelas neo-victorianas que se desarrollan en el mundo del espectáculo están escritas por autoras que sitúan la construcción social del espacio y género en el eje de la narrativa. Las heroínas diluyen los márgenes que separan el escenario y la vida

real convirtiendo de ese modo a la ciudad en su escenario. Sin embargo, tal como espero haber demostrado, en el caso de Faber, las figuras tratadas también trastocan los limites de diferentes espacios que separan lo público de lo privado, asimismo, acede a espacios públicos. En este contexto queda destacar que las mujeres llegan para apropiarse de un espacio femenino en la esfera pública.

El análisis de las novelas sigue un orden cronológico, y *Nights at the Circus* sirve como punto de partida en un doble sentido. Primero, constituye una de las primeras novelas neo-victorianas, y segundo, es la primera que se desarrolla dentro del ámbito del mundo del espectáculo—una ramificación dentro del neo-victorianismo que goza de gran auge en estos momentos. Por ejemplo, *Tipping the Velvet* escrito por Sarah Waters, cuya trilogía neo-victoriana (compuesta por *Tipping the Velvet, Affinity* y *Fingersmith*) le ha convertido en una escritora muy conocida; asimismo, la novela de Michel Faber, *The Crimson Petal and the White*, es una obra de referencia. Por último, *The Palace of Curiosities* representa una de las últimas novelas que se han publicado recientemente que giran en torno al mundo del espectáculo. Junto con el concepto de la ciudad como espectáculo, esos dos ámbitos ofrecen a la mujer la posibilidad de participar en la esfera pública y cada novela está enfocada a analizar cómo el espacio contribuye al desarrollo de su la identidad. Lefebvre insiste en "[t]he specific spatial competence and performance of every society member can only be evaluated empirically" (Lefebvre 38). En ese aspecto, resulta fundamental la contextualización de la identidad en relación con el espacio desde el punto de vista del sujeto. Como Helen Freshwater observa: "performance theory has recently begun to widen its scope. It no longer limits its inquiries to the straightforwardly performative, but stretches its interests to include the realm of everyday life" (189-90). Hemos de recordar que no sólo trata de cómo el sujeto percibe, concibe o vive el espacio, sino el impacto que puede

tener el individuo en el espacio social en caso de la mujer; su movilidad, presencia y participación en la vida urbana y cotidiana desestabiliza los límites existentes entre lo público y lo privado. Por consiguiente, los títulos seleccionados se centran en el estudio literario de lo performativo en relación con espacio social y de género, y por lo tanto, se ajustan al marco teórico elaborado previamente analizado.

Angela Carter ha contribuido significativamente a la ficción de la segunda mitad del siglo XX y principios del XXI. Rubinson califica a la autora como "the most influential figure in British women's writing since World War II " and asserts that she "self-consciously analyz[es] how gender structures social relations [and uses] fantasy to imagine worlds where androcentric and traditional gender roles have come undone" (149). Carter introdujo el mundo del espectáculo en la narrativa, lo que ha resultado en una amplia diversificación de novelas ambientadas en espacios de entretenimiento y de exhibición de la cultura popular de la época victoriana. La mujer artista adquiere una relevancia primordial como denota la diferencia entre lo teatral o lo performativo, tema tratado en el análisis de *Tipping the Velvet.* En la obra de Carter, la protagonista Sophie Fevvers transciende los limites del escenario llevando de ese modo el espectáculo al la vida cotidiana. El análisis de la novela se centra en el concepto de lo performativo en el sentido que es una de las características inherentes al modo literario neo-victorianio.

La identidad femenina como una construcción social, así como la problematización posmoderna de la diferencia entre la historia y la ficción, denominado "historiographic metafiction" por Linda Hutcheon, elaborado en su obra *Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) (Hutcheon ix), son cuestiones centrales en *Nights at the Circus* con lo cual Carter ofrece una revisión feminista del pasado convirtiendo "history into *her*story". Igual que el concepto de Hutcheon marcó un antes y un después de la critica literaria anglo-sajóna, la novela de Carter marca esa transición

de la novela histórica postmoderna hasta establecerse el neo-victorianismo como campo de estudio de la novela histórica que en el siglo XXI se está situando como un género que lleva el posmodernismo a nuevos horizontes.

En el caso de Sarah Waters, la autora logra rescatar la historia *queer* en *Tipping the Velvet* situando de ese modo la mujer lesbiana en primer plano. El tropo de la teatralidad es central al retrato de la identidad de género y tendencias lesbianas y Waters evoca las teorías de género como performativo haciendo referencia a las teorías de Judith Butler. La obra está tratada como una novela de "coming-out" que describe el proceso de descubrir, aceptar y reconocer abiertamente su identidad lesbiana, descrito por la escritora irlandesa Emma Donoghue como "a recognition of same-sex desire, and a movement outward, upward, toward coming to some kind of terms with it" is common to almost coming-out novels (*Inseparable* 162-63). En este sentido, el proceso de "coming out"[3] en *Tipping the Velvet* va ligado a su habilidad de usar la ciudad como escenario. Mediante su paso por diferentes zonas urbanas, escenarios y etapas de su descubrimiento de su identidad lesbiana, la protagonista Nan, emplea diferentes estrategias teatrales que refleja la naturaleza performativa de la identidad de género. El mensaje político de Waters es notable en las escenas finales de la novela cuando Nan interrumpe el espacio patriarcal y heteronormativo apropiándose del escenario en una reunión socialista. Allí reclama voz y presencia articulando su voz y su identidad lesbiana en público. Waters dirige la crítica hacia Jürgen Habermas y, más concretamente, hacia el concepto de la esfera pública como un teatro discursivo de igualdad descrito por el filósofo como "[the s]ocial intercourse occurred in the medium of society […] in accordance of strict rules of equality and frankness, under a code of

[3] El término "coming out" es coloquialmente referido a salir del armario en español. Sin embargo, prefiero no aplicar esa expresión aquí dado que tiende a interpretarse como un acto repentino. Al contrario, en la obra de Waters se analiza cómo un proceso paulatino que describe la evolución de la heroína por etapas hasta que encontrar su identidad lesbiana.

self-protection and courteousness" (131). Si la esfera publica consiste en "a theatre in modern society in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk […] [–] an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (Fraser 110), la situación actual de las minorías gay y lesbianas no corresponde a esa realidad y Waters incluye esta crítica hacia la desigualdad en la obra.

Hasta el momento se ha tratado dos novelas feministas que se mueven en el mundo del espectáculo con enfoque a la mujer artista. A cambio, en *The Crimson Petal and the White* Michel Faber aplica el tropo del teatro en su retrato de la prostituta Sugar y su paso por la sociedad de Londres victoriano. El novelista denota la ciudad como espectáculo, y la experiencia urbana se hace accesible para las mujeres. *The Crimson Petal and the White* acoge a las tres figuras descritas en la sección 3.1, la *flâneuse*, la prostituta y la filántropa. La visión es un elemento integral de la obra, y como Mark Llewellyn observa,

> Faber, I suggest, enacts a (potentially) deliberate tension between the contemporary reader's voyeuristic desire to "know" the seedier lives of those well-known "Other" Victorians through imitation of the female sexual subject's voice and the early twentieth-first century writer's desire to subvert, re-invent and challenge hegemonic social claims of the nineteenth-century realist mode. ("Authenticity, Authority and the Author" 187)

En lo que se refiere al género y el espacio, Faber aplica un método parecido al de Waters en su descripción de la evolución de Nan en *Tipping the Velvet*. Igual que la heroína de Waters, Sugar cumple diferentes roles que se van modificando a medida que cambia de espacios sociales, entre lo público/privado y zonas marginadas y territorios de la burguesía. Cada etapa de su ascenso por la escalera social y sus diferentes papeles como prostituta, amante, gobernanta describe el proceso de la construcción de identidad

de género. Tanto Sugar, como la filántropa Emmeline Fox, practica *flânerie* y son mujeres que atraviesan la ciudad y sus experiencias en la esfera pública tienen relevancia relativa a sus identidades. Pollock sugiere que las prácticas peatonales son fundamentales para la socialización del género y el espacio,

> [pedestrians] traverse, negotiate and transgress the official structures and ideologies of the social world, and towards a conception of the city as an imagined environment – that is, a real physical environment always perceived through the prevailing discourses *about* the city . . . urban practises of negotiating public space (and gender ideology) become visible, including, of course, the lives and peregrinations of women in the city. (26)

Tanto la visión como andar por las calles son centrales en *The Crimson Petal and the White* y no se limita a los personajes, sino que Faber sitúa al lector en la posición de un *flâneur* que observa el espectáculo urbano desde una distancia sin dejarle indiferente.

La cuarta novela, *The Palace of Curiosities*, es la más visual de las obras seleccionadas y se desenvuelve en el ámbito del *freak show*, entretenimiento que se basa en la especulación de lo visualmente extraño. El encuentro entre "el otro", expuesto en el escenario en el *freak show*, y el espectador evoca la teoría del espejismo elaborada por Jacques Lacan según la cual el sujeto asienta el yo / no yo. En esta línea, Nadine Boehm-Shcnitker and Susanne Gruss proponen que el lector contemporáneo mira hacia el pasado comparándose a sí mismo con los victorianos y por lo tanto él iguala "the second-order observation [with] the very construction of subjectivity" (10-11). Actualmente, el discurso del *freak show* y el proceso de "enfreakment" están siendo reevaluados por críticos que se centran en los artistas del *freak show* como sujetos activos en la creación de su estatus como curiosidades humanas. Hemos de destacar aquí el trabajo de Marlene Tromp and Karyn Valerius quienes proponen lo siguiene:

"enfreakment is not just about nature's work but rather is created by the body, plus its context, plus individual choices" (Introduction 8). Por lo tanto el "*gaze*" como herramienta crítica para describir el modo de observar y las posiciones de poder se presenta obsoleto.

En búsqueda de nuevos modos de mirar, el concepto del "*stare*" aparece como firme candidato. Tal y como lo ha elaborado Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, ofrece en mi opinión una herramienta viable para el análisis de la representación del freak. Garland-Thomson reconoce los dos posiciones del observador y el observado como dos integrantes activos en la negociación visual que surge, según ella, como: "an encounter between a starer and a staree [that] sets in motion an intrapersonal relationship . . . this intense visual engagement creates an circuit of communication and meaning-making. Staring becomes involvement, and being stared at demands response" (*Staring* 3). En la novela de Garland, el retrato del personaje de Eve, "the lion-faced woman", el solapamiento del género y el espacio está entretejido con lo visual en el proceso de subjetividad. Igual que Faber condiciona la perspectiva del lector, Garland involucra el lector en una especulación sobre la identidad de los personajes, al tiempo que recuerda el tratamiento de Sophie Fevvers por parte de Carter.

En definitiva, los temas tratados en cada una de las cuatro novelas se benefician del modo performativo del neo-victorianismo, y destacan todos por su carácter visual. Las novelas seleccionadas no se limitan al mundo del espectáculo, sino que en ellas se expande el concepto del espectáculo a la ciudad concebida como un gran teatro en todas las obras. Por lo tanto denomino este tipo de narrativa "novel of spectacle" ya que hace referencia a lo visual, lo teatral y lo performativo sin limitarse al mundo del entretenimiento—aspectos que son centrales en cada una de ellas. Los diferentes modos de visión tratados son la apropiación femenina del "*gaze*" masculino en *Nights at the*

Circus, la visión lesbiana, o "the *ga(y)ze*", como elaborado en *Tipping the Velvet*, el uso del "*stare*" en *The palace of Curiosities* y finalmente el voyerismo en el caso de *The Crimson Petal and the White.* El propio Faber quita importancia, e incluso llega a negar, a la centralidad del aspecto voyerista de su obra y en una entrevista sostiene: "I can't agree that the effect is one of voyeurism. Voyeurism implies that you're watching something from a safe distance, with no emotional involvement required of you" (*Bookbrowse* n. pag.). Sin embargo, hemos de destacar que es una novela densamente voyerista, algo que destaca en los episodios donde la prostituta Sugar y la filántropa Emmeline Fox ejercen *flânerie*.

La estrategia de focalización aplicada por Faber se sustenta en las estructuras visuales del *flâneur* que pasea por el panorama urbano observando la vida cotidiana como si fuese un espectáculo. Por lo tanto, la perspectiva del lector se asemeja a la posición distante o separado, pero no necesariamente indiferente, del *flâneur*. Afán a la perspectiva del lector en *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Garland utiliza otro modo de observación distinguido dentro del ámbito de los *freak show*, "*the stare*", para establecer para crear una conexión entre el pasado y el presente. A pesar de que *Nights at the Circus* and *Tipping the Velvet* no entrelaza la perspectiva del lector con los aspectos visuales recreados en *The Crimson Petal and the White* y *The Palace of Curiosities*, las obras de Carter y Waters se demuestran altamente visuales también. Por un lado, examino cómo el "*gaze*" es apropiado por Fevvers en *Nights at the Circus* y la heroína logra desestabilizar las relaciones de objecto/subjeto. Por otro lado el "*gaze*" es convertido en "*ga(y)ze*" en *Tipping the Velvet.* Sin embargo, las estructuras narrativas de las novelas de Carter y Waters se asemejan a una obra teatral en tres actos, y en definitiva, esos dos textos son "novels of spectacle" no por su aspecto visual como en el caso de Faber y Garland, sino por estilo performativo y estructura teatral.

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1. Introduction

The focus of this PhD thesis is the process of spatialising of identity in neo-Victorian literature and my aim is to explore how space and gender converge in the formation of subjectivity. I take as a starting point the assumption that space and gender are socially constructed categories drawing on Henri Lefebvre's ground-breaking volume *The Production of Social Space* (1974). This work introduced a new concept of space that stood in contrast to the prior geometric view on space:

> [l]ived experience, space is neither a mere "frame", after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed to receive anything that is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure. (Lefebvre 93-94)

I will utilise his concept of social space in this thesis to study how spatial structure conditions gendered space, and apply his view on three-dimensional space as perceived, conceived and lived. This presents a three-fold perspective on space that takes into account how we shape social spaces and how spaces shape identities, and more importantly, it testifies to how spaces are shifting and under constant production: "we are confronted not by one social space, but many – indeed by an unlimited of multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces when which we refer to generically as social space" (Lefebvre 86).

Moreover, I will explore how female subjectivity is proportionally informed by space and gender, which I will refer to as the spatialising of identity. Therefore, I will not limit my theoretical approach to Lefebvre, but rather use his ideas as a point of departure to subsequently combine his view on space with a feminist critical perspective that includes Feminist Geography and the social history of women. The feminist

geographer Susan Stanford Friedman concurs with Lefebvre in claiming that space is not static or an empty essence, but rather: "the spatial organisation of human societies, the cultural meanings and institutions that are historically produced in an through specifically spatial locations" (Stanford Friedman 109). The advances in spatial theory regarding the social dimension of space have been significant to feminist studies in particular. The development of Lefebvre's notion of social space runs parallel to the rise of Feminist Geography as a specific field concerned with the effects the social division of public and private spaces in the daily lives of women. Stanford Friedman draws attention to "the centrality of space—the rhetoric of spatiality—to the locations of identity within the mappings and remappings or ever-changing cultural transformations", and then adds:

> the new geographics figures identity as a historically embedded site, a positionality, a location, a standpoint, a terrain, an intersection, a network, a crossroads of multiply situated knowledges. It articulates not the organic unfolding of identity but rather the mapping of territories and boundaries, the dialectical terrains of inside/outside or center/margin, the axial intersections of different positionalities, and the spaces of dynamic encounter. (19)

The critic emphasises how space is conceived in multiple and overlapping ways which pinpoints the social production of space. By combining Lefebvre's spatial concept with Feminist Geography I will add a feminist perspective onto how space is produced in an attempt to discover the gendered proportions of space in relation to female subjectivity. In this context, I am concerned with the way social space is produced and then how spatial practices shape identity, i.e. spatialising identities.

Feminist geographers' inquiry into the social organisation of space leads us to two contrasting thoughts. Firstly, the separation of public and private spheres dissolved

slowly as the nineteenth-century progressed: nevertheless, it is still today inscribed in the social consciousness, and feminist geographers denounce that society is still mapped according to gender difference and thus often places spatial restraints on women. Jürgen Habermas's idealist view on the structural transformation of the public sphere, as an all-inclusive discursive space where private matters become public concern, has proved prone to criticisms because he traces the transformation to the rise of the bourgeoisie and thus situates it in a male-dominated and heteronormative frame. In contrast, Lefebvre draws attention to the unbalance in the political sphere: "there is a total, object, namely absolute political space – that strategic space which seeks to impose itself as an reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction, albeit one endowed with enormous powers because of its locus and medium of Power" (94).

We generally associate the public/private dichotomy with the nineteenth century due to its centrality to Victorian culture and the cult of true womanhood. The often-assumed assertion that the public/private dichotomy was rigorously enforced at all levels of the social strata has been challenged. As Sally Shuttleworth affirms, the ideology of separate and gendered spheres was a bourgeois ideal ("Ideologies" 33). Although the establishment of the division of separate spheres and the ensued distribution of gender roles bear their foundations in the eighteenth century and the rise of the European bourgeoisie, the highpoint of the public/private dichotomy was in Victorian era. This has led to an exorbitant overgeneralisation of all women's socially confined position in Victorian society placing most women in the blind spot. Today, scholars are paying heed to the porosity of the separation of the public/private focusing on how women were, in fact, moving within the public realm, and in doing so subverted heteropatriarchal normativity by stepping outside their allotted social roles and sphere to instead appropriate a female space within the public.

Since the late twentieth century, several social historians as, for example, Martha Vicinus, Judith Walkowitz or Deborah Epstein Nord, just to mention a few, have carried out research to prove that the public/private was in fact not as fixed as previously assumed. On the contrary, it was constantly being challenged, transgressed and subverted by women who appropriated a female space within the public sphere. In her pioneering edited volume *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977), Vicinus brought together papers that represented a fresh perspective on previous generalisations made about Victorian women and questioned clichéd images of femininity:

> it is now possible to write about areas previously unexplored. Scholars of the Victorian period are expressing considerable discomfort with the old clichés about women. . . . The passivity, frigidity, and uselessness of the female model idealized during the Victorian era in etiquette books and some fiction has come under attack for its extreme simplicity. Indeed research is now frequently concerned with the relationship, whether close, distant or confused, between the prescribed ideal of womanhood and the actual reality. We no longer generalize so steadily about the Victorian woman. ("New Trends" xi)

The work of these scholars paved the way for others to follow and as a result by the turn of the twentieth century our image of the Victorians was radically changed. Subsequently, critics tend to focus on the public realm as an area of presence rather than absence of women as they contemplate how Victorian women used different strategies to venture out into the public sphere which was a male domain. The modern city, and the new urban experience that it presented, offered women in particular the possibility to expand their roles beyond the domestic sphere.

This raises such questions as: in what way and for which purposes do contemporary authors retrieve the Victorian period and the private/public dichotomy to consider issues of gender? I suggest that neo-Victorian fiction takes on from social historians who have brought the porosity and instability of the public/private dichotomy to the forefront to stage current concerns and issues in Victorian disguise to push contemporary political agendas. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn contend that neo-Victorian literature represents a "critical 'space between', the discrepancy between what we understand the past to be and the way we reconstruct it" (47). As a historical genre it is a twofold engagement with the Victorian age: on the one hand, neo-Victorianism straddles two historical periods, namely the Victorian era and our own, and on the other hand, it is also a repetition of both a historical and a literary past. In this regard, research in neo-Victorianism covers a wide scope as it engages both with the history and the fiction of the period. Neo-Victorian studies has its roots in the postmodern problematisation of historical truth and the blurring of lines between fact/fiction, history/literature, labelled as "historiographic metafiction" by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) (Hutcheon ix). Neo-Victorian research comprises inquiries into Victorian history and literature, however, the aim of this thesis is to locate female urban figures in neo-Victorian literature to address issues regarding space and gender in an attempt to find out how contemporary authors retract Victorian women in literature. Therefore, I have chosen to adopt a socio-historical perspective in my PhD thesis in order to focus on how authors draw on feminist reconsiderations of the Victorian woman as described above, to offer a literary re-imagination of women in the context of the public/private dichotomy.

This situates my study of the space of the city in neo-Victorian novels at the intersection of space, gender and spectacle, and consequently, the concept of

performativity is central to my argument. Accordingly, this PhD thesis also explores the question of to what purpose the novels in this study work with the idea of performativity. Space and gender have been explored in neo-Victorian literature, and up to the moment critics have focused on the relevance of space to gender. The centrality of the public/private dichotomy in Victorian society hovers like an omnipresent ideology in neo-Victorian fiction. However, critics have overseen the relationship between space and gender in the spatialising of identities, and to my knowledge, no study of Lefebvre's social space or feminist geography has been carried out in a neo-Victorian context. My project covers a critical gap in neo-Victorian literary studies as it contributes to previous studies of gender as socially constructed by adding the argument that space is equally a socially constructed category. While space affects the subject and circumscribes gender identities, the subject also manipulates, alters and changes spaces as the individual participates in the social production of space. Vicinus remarks, "even within the confines of Victorian life, all classes of women were being changed and were changing society" ("New Trends" xi). Thus, subjectivity and spatialising of identities are key issues to inquiries into the gendered spaces. Nevertheless, I am not denying the existence of the public/private dichotomy nor neglecting the reinforcement of gendered spheres. On the contrary, I admit that it imbued society. What I am doing here is to focus on how it was a widening, changing and porous dichotomy, constantly challenged, transgressed and subverted. In this regard, contemporary authors retrieve the public/private dichotomy in literature as well as clichéd images of the Victorians to alter our view of them and also of ourselves.

Chapter 2 is entitled "Geography of Spaces and Gender in Victorian Culture" and comprises two sections that take into consideration the social production of space and its relevance to gender, the city as a social space and the Victorian woman's social

position. In the first section, "Geography of Spaces: An Overview", I begin with establishing a context in which to understand the spatialising of identities and its relevance to gender. In this vein, section 2.1. provides an overview of space and gender that will serve as a framework with which to discuss the view of the city as social space open for women's participation in the public realm in subsequent sections. I will describe Lefebvre's notion of triadic space; how the two levels of spatial practice and representation of space are made functional in representational space, also referred to as the perceived-conceived-lived triangle. In section 2.2., "Geography of the Victorian Space and Gender" includes two parts that consider space and gender in the Victorian period. Firstly, I will develop the idea of the city as spectacle and focus on the inherent theatricality of Victorian London. Here, I will apply Lefebvre's model of spatial practice to see to what extent the city is a socially produced space. I am interested in finding out in what way and for what purposes contemporary authors engage with the idea of the city as a theatre and the performativity of city life, to be developed later in chapter 5. Secondly, I provide a panoramic overview of the Victorian public/private dichotomy and woman's social position within this ideologically-biased division of men's and women's spheres. I wish to point out that it is not my intention to carry out an in-depth analysis of the Victorian woman, and the section only touches upon some of the central points of how nineteenth-century patriarchal normativity framed women within fixed parameters. However, such a description felt necessary as this thesis contradicts, challenges and questions this ideology. The section therefore should be seen as a background that I will use as support later when I shed a different light on Victorian society.

The structure of chapter 3 has been designed according to public spaces and the figures that belong to each realm. I focus on the public sphere and consider, on the one

hand, the streets and female urban strollers, and on the other hand, the world of spectacle and different female performers. In section 3.1.1. I have focused on three female figures that could be encountered on the streets of the Victorian city: the *flâneuse*, the philanthropist and the prostitute. I part from the idea that urban spaces were open for female experience and thus women adopted different strategies to gain access to the streets. I will offer an alternative female figure to the concept of the Baudelairean *flâneur* but rather than arguing that there existed a female counterpart of this male urban stroller, I will focus on which features distinguish him as a *flâneur* and see how these can be detected in women as well. Rather than giving a female version of the male *flâneur*, who represents the male experience of the modern city, I will attempt to locate a *flâneuse* in the context of a female experience of the city. Later, I will expand my ideas on the philanthropist and the prostitute, who like the *flâneuse*, walked the streets.

The second section of chapter 3 examines female professional performers and how these public women acquired voice and agency through acts of performance on stage. The chapter as a whole defies the view of female urban figures as object of the male gaze. My aim is to demonstrate how different female figures transgressed imposed gender norms and spatial limits. These women destabilised the public/private dichotomy by claiming their presence on stage. Yet, I will move beyond the view of female professional performers as socially stigmatised women for making public display of their bodies in exchange for money. I will adopt a different approach to the music-hall actress, the circus performer and the freak show exhibit claiming that these women pursued an alternative and independent lifestyle on the stage and moreover, claimed a voice and asserted agency within performative spaces. I will put emphasis on how bourgeois moral codes were not always applicable to popular entertainment forms,

and thus, the female professional performer is a figure who needs to be explored more thoroughly.

Chapter 4 offers a state of the art of neo-Victorian literature to trace this relatively new historical genre from its origins to present position within the twenty-first century literary arena. Here, I will argue that the neo-Victorian literary mode is performative and outline some of the key tenets focusing on its visual features. In previous chapters I focus on space, gender and the city and pay particular attention to the visual charactersitcs of the urban experience in the Victorian era. Thus, I hope to demonstrate in "State of the Art: Neo-Victorianism in the Twenty-First Century" that this historical subgenre is a suitable mode for authors to delve into the past to explore issues regarding space and gender. I will outline the key tenets that underpin the neo-Victorian performative mode drawing on scholars as Sarah Gamble, Ann Heilmann, Mark Llewellyn, Rosario Arias and Marie-Lousie Kohlke. Accordingly, I will argue that neo-Victorianism is inherently self-reflexive and self-reflective metafictional as discussed by Heilmann and Llewellyn in *The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010), densely visual as several scholars have noted, Gamble, Heilmann and Arias, just to mention a few, and vocal as highlighted by Kohlke.

Central to this is also the concept of the reader as observer, and the emphasis on the visual, that intertwines the above-mentioned characteristics. As I have argued elsewhere, neo-Victorian literature evokes the idea of the novel as a theatrical spectacle for the reader. This consists in an enactment of the past that situates the reader in the position of a spectator to observe the staging of contemporary issues on the neo-Victorian scene (13).[1] The performative mode allows for contemporary critical theories

[1] See chapter one in my volume *Gender Performance and Spatial Negotiation in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (In press) where I argue that this was a trope applied by Victorian authors as well, as for instance, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847), where he opens the novel with a chapter "Before the Curtain" (37).

to bear on nineteenth-century culture, and is particularly suitable for feminist revisionary projects. Diana Wallace holds that women writers of historical fiction are often politically driven and concerned with being granted a voice: "refashioning history thorough fiction as part of the urgent need to tell 'her story'" (176). Lately, the Victorian world of spectacle has attracted feminist writers who use nineteenth-century entertainment spaces to explore gender issues both in the past and the present. Notwithstanding, as I hope to demonstrate in the ensued analysis in chapter 5, neo-Victorian novels that are concerned with space and gender present far more complex undertakings than feminist revisionary projects of male-centred history.

In chapter 5, I carry out an examination of four neo-Victorian novels: Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013) focusing on how space and gender converge in the spatialising of identities. Three of the novels evolve within the Victorian world of spectacle and Faber's novel may seem as the odd one out. However, this choice has been taken after careful consideration as space, gender and theatricality are at the heart of *The Crimson Petal and the White*. Although it does not turn to nineteenth-century entertainment spaces, Faber employs the trope of theatricality and draws on the idea of the city as spectacle in his representation of Victorian London.

Each novel depicts one or more of the different urban figures that previously have been explored in chapter 3 and I will focus on the significance of space in regard to the gendered experience of the female characters in Carter's, Waters's, Faber's and Garland's work. I aim to find out to what extent the authors engage with the public/private dichotomy as described in section 2.2.2. simultaneously as they interlock with twenty- and twenty-first century revisions of Victorian women as discussed in

chapter 3. The concept of social space is central to my analysis of all novels and I will explore to what extent Lefebvre's theory is illustrated in the spatial practices of the different characters.

Firstly, in section 5.1. entitled "Neo-Victorian Entertainment Spaces in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984)", I will approach the novel as a theatrical and feminist text and look into how Fevvers represents a female performer in every possible sense. I will examine her as a drawing-room performer, female freak, music-hall artist and circus aerialist to discuss the inherent performativity of the text. My aim is to find out in what way this novel anticipates the neo-Victorian mode and how the novel paves the way for others to follow. Up to the moment, Carter's novel has attracted critical attention as a feminist and carnivalesque novel, by for example, Paulina Palmer, Sara Martín Alegre and Helen Stoddart, to mention a few. Moreover, it is regularly referred to as one of the earliest examples of neo-Victorian fiction. Nevertheless, as I hope to show, *Nights at the Circus* also represents the first example of the neo-Victorian ramification of the world of spectacle and, to my knowledge, it has not received attention as such—with this in mind I hope to offer a new reading into Carter's contextualisation of gender issues within performative spaces.

Secondly, I will consider Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) as a coming-out novel and discuss how the lesbian heroine and music-hall masher, Nan, turns different spaces into sites of performance and comes to terms with her lesbian selfhood in the process. Waters takes on from Carter in using the Victorian world of spectacle as a space to explore issues of space and gender. Waters's pushes further than Carter by queering the Victorian *Bildungsroman* and her concern for queer politics is distinctly pronounced in her treatment of lesbian identity and public and private spaces, hence, the title of 5.2. is "Spatialising Lesbian Identity in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*

(1998)". In this context I will explore how the protagonist utilises theatrical strategies to transgress gendered spaces and reveals the performative nature of gender identity in the process.

Thirdly, in "Mapping Social Spaces in the City: Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002)" I will explore the liminal figures of the prostitute Sugar and the philanthropist Emmeline Fox focusing on how they destabilise the public/private dichotomy, and discuss how their urban experiences turn them into *flâneuses*. Faber is not a feminist author, however, gender, identity and space are central themes in the novel, and my purpose is to find out how the author depicts the process of spatialising idenitities of two unconventional women. In contrast to the other three authors under consideration, Faber employs the trope of theatricality in his portrayal of Victorian London to evoke the nineteenth-century culture of urban spectacle. I will pay special attention to the voyeuristic features of *The Crimson Petal and the White* and connect this to the reader's perspective.

Finally, in 5.4. "How We Look: Neo-Victorian Enfreakment in Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013)", I will focus on the female freak and discuss how voice, vision and agency intertwine in spaces of enfreakment. I will pay heed to how Garland manages to attribute human value to freak exhibits and, as a result, she envisions freak performers from a perspective that is at odds with the Victorian frame of mind. The author approaches this exploitative entertainment institution from a modern point of view to take a closer look at the individual behind the freak and explore the performer's subjective response to the spectacle of the spectacular body. I hope to demonstrate how the characters in *The Palace of Curiosities* struggle to assert agency through acts of performance on and off the stage, and subsequently, engage the reader in a self-reflexive game reminiscent of the visual dynamics of the freak show.

By bringing *Nights at the Circus*, *Tipping the Velvet*, *The Crimson Petal and the White* and *The Palace of Curiosities* together, this PhD thesis explores neo-Victorian novels, from its early beginnings upto the recent, taking into account both male and female authors that all probe the process of spatialising of idenitites in different manners. Each novel focuses on at least one of the different urban figures that have will considered in chapter three. Whether theatrical enactments and gender performance or the view and conceptualisation of the city as a spectacle, I hope to demonstrate how the four novels under consideration hinge upon the notion of spectacle in a homogenous way.

2. Geography of Spaces and Gender in Victorian Culture

Space, like gender, is socially constructed and consequently inflected and conditioned by cultural values. In this regard, the social conception of space and gender is bound to a specific culture and particular time. The Victorian era was the highpoint of the public/private dichotomy and the gendered division of separate spheres circumscribed the lives of women in particular. This chapter offers a different perspective on the often-repeated assertion that the public/private ideology dictated woman's space and identity. The feminist geographer Doreen Massey contends:

> the importance of the existence of this variable construction of gender relations in different local-cultural space/places, and the importance of documenting and analysing it, is not merely to reveal once again the fact of geographical variation. . . . it undermines those arguments . . . which rely on attributions of characteristics as 'natural' to men and women. (178)

The main questions addressed in this chapter revolve around how spatial structure conditions gendered space and how female subjectivity is proportionally informed by space and gender in the spatialising of identity. The chapter has been divided into two sections in which I focus on space and gender, the city as a social space and the Victorian public/private dichotomy.

The first section examines the social construction of space and gender bringing together spatial theory and feminist studies to discuss what workings lie behind the production of social space and gender identities. I take as a starting point Henri Lefebvre's ideas regarding the three-dimensionality of social space and his elaboration of the concept of triadic space, as it challenges the view on space as an empty geometrical container that exist a priori (Schmid 28). On the contrary, space as a socially produced category originates in a social performance, i.e. the practices of

everyday life. I will relate his ideas to other critical thinkers who have elaborated theories on space and urban studies, as Jürgen Habermas and Michel de Certeau. In addition, I will examine how the production of social space intersects with other constructed categories focusing primarily on gender.

Feminist spatial criticism has been asserted as a field in its own right, known as Feminist Geography, and undertakes the study of the spatialising of identities since it developed and expanded in the 1980s. Although Lefebvre's seminal volume *The Production of Space* was first written in 1974, it was not translated into English until the early 1990s, when his work underwent a significant renaissance. However, I wish to emphasise that the two disciplines' development run parallel and I aim to illustrate an approach that combines Feminist Geography and Spatial Studies, Lefebvre's theory in particular, and that proves fruitful for research regarding gender and space. Thus, interdisciplinary approaches that combine Feminist Geography with the French philosopher's ideas have been few up to the moment, but, as I hope to demonstrate in the present section, projects that set out to dishevel the social patterns that underpin spatial practice and gender identity benefit from an interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, Judith Butler's theory on gender performances is contemporary to the growing popularity of Lefebvre's work and, as Helen Freshwater contends: "performance theory has recently begun to widen its scope. It no longer limits its inquiries to the straightforwardly performative, but stretches its interests to include the realm of everyday life" (189-90).

In the second section, I will argue that the city is a social space concentrating on Victorian London to determine urban space and practices in terms of theatricality, spectacle and performance. I will draw on contemporary rethinking of the geographical status of the city and highlight the ways in which the city is socially produced. John

Allen, Doreen Massey and Michael Pryke suggest that dual perspective to consider urban space "on the one hand, in the context of social relations that stretch *beyond* the city, and, on the other hand, by the intersection of social relation within the city" (vii). In this vein, I will concentrate on how the city is conceived, perceived and lived in the daily practices of every-day life and tie in Lefebvre's notion of triadic space with, what Ackroyd defines as, the inherent performativity of the city of London (*London* 150-52).

Additionally, in 2.2.2. "Space and Gender in Victorian Culture: The Public versus Private Dichotomy", I will provide a brief, but necessary, overview of women's position in relation to the public/private dichotomy in the Victorian era. Lately, the Victorian ideology of separate spheres has been a disputed subject within gender studies and several scholars focus on to what extent the ideal of separate spheres was enforced in Victorian society, particular in working-class culture as this strictly bourgeois normativity proved dysfunctional among the labouring class. Thus, my aim in this section is to merely touch upon some of the central issues regarding women's social status in the Victorian period in order to settle the key tenets that underpin the public/private dichotomy. In subsequent chapters I will focus on the porosity of this gendered ideology and highlight how the restrictions enforced by the separate-spheres normativity was constantly under pressure, being challenged, destabilised and subverted by women who appropriated a female space within the public sphere.

2.1. Geography of Spaces: An Overview

The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre's (1901-91) theory on the production of space has turned him into one of the leading European critical thinkers. He was a multidisciplinary critic and during his lifetime he wrote over sixty volumes alongside an

array of publications concerned with subjects ranging from philosophy, sociology, literature, music, linguistics and urban studies. Several scholars coincide on the point that "belatedly, Lefebvre's reputation has grown exponentially as a leading figure in European philosophy and social theory; and his pioneering work on space, everyday life, and global urbanization have revitalized urban theory, geography, planning, architecture, and cultural studies" (Goonewrdena et al. 1-2). Lefebvre developed his spatial theory at a moment when the concept of producing space was still unusual, which the philosopher was highly aware of when asking, "[is] the absence of a criticism of space . . . simply the result of a lack of terminology?" (92). Little attention was given to Lefebvre in the 1970s and 80s.[2] In fact, it was first in the 1990s that his ground-breaking volume *The Production of Space* (1974) was translated into English.[3] At that moment his work underwent a renaissance, and consequently, he has been situated as a key critical thinker within several fields of studies. Today Lefebvre's pivotal *The Production of Space* is routinely quoted by academics from a wide range of disciplines spanning from philosophy and social sciences to geography and the arts.

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre challenged the strictly geometrical view of space as an empty area. On the contrary, "(social) space is a (social) product" and in order to understand the sociological dimension of space and time, it is fundamental to disengage from traditional views of space that considered it as something immaterial, as a pure concept a priori. Conversely, space is fundamentally bound up with social reality, which Christian Schmid explains in the following terms, "space does not exist 'in itself'; it is produced" (28). Dismantling the idea of space as neutral or empty, Lefebvre

[2] Lefebvre's work was for a long period a marginalised theory in Europe. For a detailed description of the reception of Lefebvre's thoughts in France and Germany see "On the Production of Henri Lefebvre", in Goonewrdena, Kipfer, Milgram and Schmid's *Space, Difference, Everyday Life* (2008).

[3] Henri Lefebvre's *Production de l'espace* (1974) was first translated into English in 1991 as *The Production of Space* by Donald Nicholson-Smith. This has led to a world-wide diffusion of his theory.

claims that space is not an empty container to be filled but "a lived experience bound up with function and structure" (93-94). According to this critical thinker, space is an on-going production of spatial relations he refers to as the conceptual triad. This involves three different levels of space, something Lefebvre refers to as "the perceived-conceived-lived triad". This three-dimensional interpretation of space is grouped into spatial practice, representations of space and representational space respectively (Lefebvre 40).

First, spatial practice denotes the production and reproduction of spatial relations between objects and products. In Lefebvre's words, "the spatial practice of a society is revealed through deciphering its space", in other words, "[i]t embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks that link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure)" (Lefebvre 38). Therefore, the critic stresses how "[t]he specific spatial competence and performance of every society member can only be evaluated empirically" (Lefebvre 38). Second, the notion of representations of space has to do with the relations of production and the order they impose—how space is conceived. Thus, it could be described as the conceptualised space of scientists, urban planners etc. Third, representational space, or lived space, corresponds to how space is directly experienced by inhabitants, i.e. "the lived experience that emerges as a result of the dialectical relationship between social practice and representation of space" (Canete n. pag.). The production of space emerges in the interplay between the triadic principle of space that consists of dialectically interconnected dimensions or processes. As Schmid argues, "viewed from a phenomenological perspective, the production of space is thus grounded in a three-dimensionality that is identifiable in every social process" (40).

Lefebvre also draws attention to how different societies assign different gender roles and this is highly relevant as both space and gender are socially constructed categories. This is an idea I will develop further by firstly considering space as a social practice and, secondly, look into gender as a social performance to finally examine what workings lie behind spatialising of identities. Lefebvre claims that "[t]ime and space are not separable within a texture so conceived: space implies time, and vice versa" (Lefebvre 118). Thus, space and gender are socially produced, and consequently, conditioned by its socio-cultural context. Yet, this also makes these culturally inscribed categories transferable, fluid and open for change. In this sense, echoing Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga's words, "space, like time, is never neutral, never critically transparent, and its artistic representation is always intentional, dialectical, and culturally embedded" (Introduction 19).

Lefebvre encouraged scholars to undertake interdisciplinary approaches to spatial studies and stressed the relevance of spatial criticism in relation to other fields claiming,

> we are after all talking about the setting we live in. Criticism of literature, art or drama is concerned with people and institutions . . . Vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere 'frame', after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure. (92)

Hence, literary representations of space reflect the contemporary sociological framework of authors and serve as a vehicle of socio-political comment. Philip E Wegner notices how the concept of space has entered into literary studies from different

directions, among those feminism and gender studies that are concerned with the body, sexuality and the embodiment of the subject (181). The critic states that an attention to the historical spatial dimension of cultural practices has changed the way we think about literature and history, and he points out that this has been a central issue in postcolonial literary studies (190). This new focus values marginalised forms and practices and consequently minorities become increasingly important. Therefore, the spatialising of identities is a fundamental part of literary analysis because it affects the way we interpret the work we read and how we read the world that surrounds us. In Wegner's words "[a]n attention to issues of space and spatiality promises to change not only how we read literature, but also what we read" (196).

The volume *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women* was first published in 1981 and compiles essays of feminist geographers who explore how space is conceived and perceived by women. It was reissued in 1993 as a response to academic demand, after having been out of print for over a decade (Ardener, Preface ix). As mentioned above, during the 1980s (social) space was still a neglected field of research and at the time the first edition was published it was an innovative contribution to geography as the contributors considered space in opposition to place and, moreover, added the category of gender. Shirley Ardener insists that space reflects social organisation and holds:

> [s]ocieties have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by intangible bridges with as much trepidation or exultation as on plank over a raging torrent. ("Ground Rules and Social Maps" 1-2)

Although Ardener does not make any reference to Lefebvre's work, her argument of space as socially produced describes his triadic notion of the production of space, or perceived-conceived-lived triad; how societies conceive their environment (conceived), how people make meaning of it (perceived) and play their roles in everyday life (lived). At the time, Ardener denounces, "no emphasis has been given to the distinction between 'place' and 'space', as used by geographers" ("Ground Rules and Social Maps" 4). Today, however, the difference between place and space is well established among scholars and the specialised terminology, which Lefebvre missed in the 1970s, has been standardised within contemporary criticism.

One of the most prominent feminist geographers of her generation, Doreen Massey, stresses how gender is a significant constituent in geographical constructions of space and place denoting that the two "are important in the construction of gender relations and in struggles to change them" (179). Both space and place, like gender, are categories that are transferable, culturally bound and open for change. Nevertheless, there are some clear and noteworthy differences between space and place that can be singled out. On the one hand, place is a geographical area associated with a physical location with established borders. These borders are politically established and culturally enforced, hence, place becomes a specific area with a certain topographic position. Although place is defined by geopolitical borders that are transferable and malleable, in contrast to space, it is a geographical site that can be physically experienced. Space is, on the other hand, the functional meaning of a place and generally described as a mental or psychological experience. Michel de Certeau refers to space as "a practical place" which is made meaningful through social practices (qtd in Fenster 243). This means that place is a topographic expression of geographical location whereas space is a social and functional manifestation of place. De Certeau

emphasises the subjective experience of the city and the individual interaction with urban spaces and links the theory of everyday practices to lived space and the "disquieting familiarity of the city" (96).

De Certeau distinguishes two levels; on the one hand, he approaches the city from above as a panorama-city that the observer takes visual possession from his superior and detached position:

> [h]is elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. (92)

This viewpoint coincides with Lefebvre's spatial representation, in other words, how urban planners and geographers conceive space. On the other hand, de Certeau singles out walking as an elementary mode of experiencing the city as the proximity to urban spaces intertwine the spatial knowledge and practical function of the city:

> [t]he ordinary practioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which its visibility begins. . . . they are walkers, *Wandersmän*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen. (93)

The philosopher denotes space as a socially constructed and recognises the different layers that contribute to the subjective experience of the city and clearly accentuates how space adds as a social dimension to place.

In an attempt to describe the distinction between different types of spaces Lefebvre stresses that "the term used is far less important than the distance that separates the 'ideal' space, which has to do with mental (logico-mathematical)

categories, from 'real' space, which is the space of social practice. In actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins and presupposes the other" (14). Although sometimes space is determined according to geographical location, it is normally settled in the context of a socially inscribed positionality and function, i.e. spatial practice according to Lefebvre, which in turn invites for negotiation, subversion and appropriation of a socially constructed sphere.

Richard L Stein notes that Lefebvre's theory of social space has altered our perception of geographical categories as stable and stating: "*The Production of Space* (1991) has complicated the apparently straightforward meaning of such categories as ground, space and place" (321). Nonetheless, Lefebvre was not the first to notice the social dimension of space. Jürgen Habermas's (b 1924) volume *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), translated into English in 1989, only two years before Lefebvre, is an important contribution to spatial studies and traces the rise and the development of the modern state. Habermas holds that the public sphere is discursive and social, and one of his main contributions is that he set the public sphere of the state against civil society. The philosopher bridges the public and the private, and as Craig Calhoun remarks that "Habermas treats identities and interests as settled within the private world and then brought fully formed into the public sphere" (35), and in this sense,

> a private sphere of society could take on public relevance. . . . It became possible to recognize society in the relationships and organizations created for sustaining life and to bring these into public relevance by bringing forward the interest for a public discussion and/or the action of the state. (Calhoun 8-9)

Habermas's theory regarding the public sphere has had an immense impact on spatial theory as it foregrounds the public realm as an inclusive and discursive arena where inequalities can be bridged mainly through dialogue to discuss common interest:

> [a]lthough it had more or less been solidly integrated into the hieratically ordered, locally rooted representations of social ranks, the public could nevertheless be interpreted as composed by free individuals. Social intercourse occurred in the medium of society . . . in accordance of strict rules of equality and frankness, under a code of self-protection and courteousness. (Habermas 131)

Habermas focuses on a particular society at a specific point in history and traces the development of public/private dichotomy to the growth of the bourgeoisie. Even though he describes the transformation of the public sphere as "a continual expansion [that] include[s] more and more participants" his notion of an all-inclusive public realm of social discourse focuses on the eighteenth century and is consequently delimited within a patriarchal framework (Calhoun 3).[4] The public sphere is thus narrowed down to educated and propertied male elite that enjoys a privileged status in a gender-polarised society, and as a result his theory has been prone to feminist criticism.

Nancy Fraser disapproves of Habermas's conceptualisation of transnational public sphere in terms of a space that is conceived as a fair and all-inclusive communicative generation of public opinion (76). Yet, Fraser's criticism of Habermas does not consist of a wish to eradicate the public/private dichotomy, conversely, she urges for the need to "repoliticize public-sphere theory" (Fraser 78). On the one hand, she favours Habermas's idea of the public sphere as "a theatre in modern society in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk . . .[, i.e.] an

[4] Several critics have drawn attention to the limitations of Habermas's theory as it is enclosed within a Westphalian framework and thereby is restricted to a specific time and place in history.

institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (110). On the other hand, Fraser draws attention to the flaws in his theory, noticing how "he fails to examine other nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres" (115). The major impediment of Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere is that his ideas are clearly situated within a patriarchal and heteronormative framework of the European bourgeoisie, and as a result, the ideal of the public sphere as a site of verbal interchange that bridges social differences, is limited to the interest of male, middle class and heterosexual citizens.

However, the main flaw in Habermas's theory is, in my opinion, the idea that identity and personal interests are settled in the private realm and subsequently articulated and expressed in the public sphere. He rightfully acknowledges the social production of space and suggests that the public sphere is a theatre of social discourse, hence, a performative space. Nevertheless, he overlooks its relevance to the shaping of identity and opinion. I suggest that the public sphere and individual participation and interaction contribute to the shaping of identity, and that the social dimension of space as practical function of everyday life, as described by Lefebvre and de Certeau above, are central to the subjective experience of space as well as gender.

2.1.1. Gender (and Space)

Gender adds another fundamental dimension to the analysis of space, place and the formation of identity. I speak of gender in terms of a socially constructed category which refers to the roles and identities attributed to men and women according to social norms of masculinity and femininity. In contrast, sex is a term applying to the biologically ascribed functions that differentiate men from women. This separation between sex and gender has been widely accepted both within and outside feminist

contexts in contemporary society.[5] Judith Butler (b 1956) is one of the key critical thinkers within gender studies and her ideas on gender as performative have played a central role in the development of queer theory at the end of the twentieth century. Previously, feminists like Simone De Beauvoir who famously stated "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (281),[6] or Monique Witting and Julia Kristeva who both have drawn on concepts of masquerade and mimesis in their theories on femininity have all argued that woman as a category is governed by social and cultural norms.[7] These critics have influenced Butler deeply and their thoughts on gender have been central to her work (Lloyd 37). As a contrast to other critics, Butler denounced the prevailing heteronormativity within feminist criticism and questioned woman as a unitary category. This is something that she delves into in her volume *Gender Trouble* (1990).

In this work, the scholar describes gender as a social construct that does not exist a priori as an expression of an inner identity. Conversely, Butler invites us to think about gender as the result of a stylised repetition of social acts stating the following: "[c]onsider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190). Accordingly, there is a three-fold division between sexuality, gender and gender identity, which do not necessarily correspond to each other. In other words, gender is a social construct that is independent of anatomical sex, and moreover, gender identity arises in its performance – not the other way around. Butler states,

[5] For a detailed comparison between sex and gender visit the World Health Organization's webpage.

[6] To a great extent, Butler draws on De Beauvoir's distinction between sex and gender. In addition, Moya Lloyd argues that Butler had been unable to develop her theory of gender performance without *The Second Sex* (1952), mainly because of the idea of becoming a woman (37).

[7] See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* for further detail on how the critic recaptures Monique Witting's and Julia Kristeva's ideas on female masquerade. Also relevant is Joan Riviere's and Luce Irigaray's distinction of femininity as "a mask donned for social performances", but whereas Riviere identifies woman with the mask, Irigaray speaks about a mimetic performance of femininity (Gregson and Rose 433).

> [t]hat gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (*Gender Trouble* 192-93)

Thereby, she questions the prevailing heteronormativity within society and the bipolar categorisation between men and women, something that has turned her into a leading figure within gender studies and queer criticism. Butler's main concerns are sexuality, gender identity and heteronormativity, and albeit her theory has little to say about space and place, her ideas regarding performativity have been deeply influential in twenty- and twenty-first century criticism.

Butler's theory on performance has expanded beyond gender studies and applied to other disciplines, among them, geography. However, its feasibility as a critical tool for space and place has been questioned. Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose recognise that the concept of performativity can be theorised in several ways and highlight how performance must always be read in the context of performativity. These critics contend that "to see social identities as performed is to imply that identities are in some sense constructed in and through social action, rather than existing anterior to social processes" (434). Consequently, they stress the relevance of performativity to critical human geography that examines constructions of social identity and difference, its power relations and how space may articulate this. However, taking into account Lefebvre's distinction between representations of space and representational space, Butler's ideas make sense to spatial theory. This is mainly because she defies the taken-for-granted heterosexism and how society is organised in heteronormative terms. In

addition, social space is a fundamental constituent in the process of construction of gender – or spatialising identities – an idea I will return to later. Therefore, bearing Lefebvre's triadic view of temporality in mind, it becomes clear that both the production and reproduction of space (spatial practice) and they way we conceptualise space (representations of space) is conditioned by heteronormativity. This, moreover, affects our lived experience of space (representational space). Minelle Mahtani stresses the need to consider

> [the] effects bodily performances may have on understandings of sexuality and space. Thus, instead of thinking about space and place as pre-existing sites that occur, these studies have argued that bodily performances themselves constitute or (re)produce space. (68)

Then, if neither gender identity nor space are fixed pre-determined categories that exist a priori, but instead, are socially produced and culturally inscribed, Butler's performative theory may serve as a viable critical tool for spatial studies.

Gregson and Rose maintain that performance and performativity are crucial concepts for studies that intend to "denaturalise taken-for-granted social practices" that concur with their emphasis on the creativity of every-day life (434). Nevertheless, the application of Butler's gender performance on feminist geography has been criticised. For instance, Lise Nelson reprehends the way geographers have deployed Butler's theory uncritically and even wrongfully supported their arguments on a misreading of gender performance. She denounces that geographers have ignored the limitations of performativity, which she pinpoints as intentionality: "performativity ontologically assumes an abstracted subject (i.e. abstracted as a subject *position* in a given discourse) and thus provides no space for conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the doing of identity" (332). On the one hand, despite her extensive knowledge of Butler's work,

Nelson's argument is flawed because she narrows down gender identities to an unconscious performance. Yet, I wish to point out that the subject's awareness of the proper gender identity and the possibility or impossibility to openly enact according to social space proves Nelson's statement wrong. Gender performance can be intentional and used reversely as a strategy to hide one's true gender identity. This is why Butler enhances gender identity as fluid, transferable and multiple, or "constantly in the process of being remade" (*Gender Trouble* 10). What is more, as quoted above, Butler clearly determines gender identity as "*intentional* and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and *contingent construction of meaning*" (Butler 190; emphasis added). Therefore, it is apparent that performativity can be read into studies of female subjectivity in a spatial context. On the other hand, Nelson recognises feminist geographers' effort in introducing Butlerian performance into spatial criticism by acknowledging, "theorizing sexuality and gender as performative can transform static, pre-discursive notions of space and place. By drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, [feminist geographers have] enhanced the theoretical scope of sexuality, place, space and identity" (335). She sees the possibilities of exploring these notions within feminist geography and invites for new and nuanced readings of Butler into this discipline. Hence, it is crucial to see what workings lay behind the spatialising of identities to understand the complex interrelationship between space and gender.

Massey argues that "[t]he intersections and mutual influences of 'geography' and 'gender' are deep and multifarious. Each is, in profound ways, implicated in the construction of the other . . . " (177). She explains how geography influences the formation of gender identities and gender relations, and highlights that gender is likewise a significant dimension in the construction of "the geographical". Similarly, feminist geographer Pamela Moss argues that "[w]omen and men transform places

through their interactions in and with them; simultaneously these gendered beings are defined and perhaps altered by the places themselves" (111). This proves that the three categories of space, place and gender interlock in the process of subjectivity in a two-fold way. Ardener explains how space is a dual form of perception: "*space reflects social organisation*, but of course, once space has been bounded and shaped it is no longer merely a neutral background: it exerts its own influence" (4). At the same time as people's behaviour in certain environments is conditioned by the type of space it is, the space influences the interaction between its occupants. As stated above, space and gender are conditioned by place as well as having an impact on the geographically bound area in question. As the three categories intersect in the formation of identity and share some key features as, for example, being unfixed and malleable, I will henceforth use the word "place" when referring to a specific, physical or geographical location and apply the term "space" when speaking about socially constructed spheres in order to keep them separate.

2.1.2. Feminist Geography: The Development of a New Feminist Spatial Critique

Feminist geography is a relatively young discipline that dates back to the 1970s when female geographers started to question the inherent masculinity within geography. Then, the main concern for women working within the field of geography was simply to get the issue of gender on to the agenda. The following decade feminist geographers started to look for different approaches to geography as research topics, methods, tools, and even the specific language resulted exclusively male and out-dated. Therefore, feminists embarked on new projects to innovate geography as a science by including new and fresh feminist perspectives to the field, which would give rise to an entire new

discipline, which has come to be labelled as feminist geography. From its beginnings, the core of feminist geography is constituted by research considering place, space and gender with a specific interest in gendered spatial relations. According to the Women and Geography Research Group, feminist geography is

> a geography which explicitly takes into account the socially created gender structure of society, and in which a commitment both towards the alleviation of gender inequality in the short term and towards its removal, through social change towards a real equality, in the longer term, is expressed. (21)

Feminist geography involves a manifold field of sub-disciplines, like post-structuralism, post-modernism, Marxism, socialism etc., and ranges over a wide scope of themes concerning different categories such as race, age, sexuality and class in the combination with gender and space. Pamela Moss identifies feminist geography as a research field that in practice either undertakes feminist research in geography or approaches geography as feminist (6). What is important, though, is that feminist geography as a separate discipline sets a context-specific framework for research looking into issues concerning place, space and gender.

Since its origins, feminist geography has been deeply concerned with the relationship between waged and unwaged work and gender inequalities, something that has proved to be clearly linked to domestic responsibilities and topographical organisation—issues that are still debated today. Tovi Fenster argues that space is where cultural citizenship values can be seen clearly through public/private devices in relation to forbidden/permitted spheres "because cultural construction of space has inherent in its symbolism the legitimacy to exclude women from power and influence" (245). At first, one principal concern for feminist geographers was to examine the reasons behind the socially constructed inequities regarding paid and unpaid work.

Women were mostly allocated to the private domain where they were attributed unwaged domestic labour. Conversely, men were associated with the public realm of institutional and official organisations that placed them in a position with waged work away from the home. This takes us to the division between male and female space into public and private realms respectively. The identification of the personal or private realm with women, and the understanding of domestic concerns as specifically feminine, are juxtaposed with the public male world of paid labour and formal political activity. The notion of a gendered division of public and private spheres is indebted to the social division of male and female roles in the nineteenth century and to a large extent rooted in Victorian moral codes of behaviour, which will be explained in section 2.2.2. Members of the Women and Geography Study Group claim that this binary division of space as male or female is still a matter of concern and has led to a general interpretation of men and women as equal but different (24). Nevertheless, scholars assert that:

> [one] feature of all feminist argument is that these differences in the social position of men and women systematically work to the advantage of men so that women and men in fact have unequal power, opportunities and social prestige. (Women and Geography Study Group 24)

Although feminist geography emerged as a separate field of studies in the 1980s, feminist concerns had already started to spread within geography ten years before. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager denote geography as a discipline that was remarkably reluctant to embrace feminist scholarship (3). Consequently, the development of feminism within geography has been slow. Early pre-feminist geography scholars were mainly occupied with demanding female presence at the academic table and introducing feminist issues within a coherently male tradition in accordance with the notions of accountability,

visibility and equality associated with Women's Lib (Nelson and Seager 4).[8] Scholars embarking on feminist research of geography applied theoretical frameworks, such as, radical feminism, Marxism or socialist-feminist approaches. The efforts of feminists in the 1970s to make women more visible within geography have proved to be not only necessary but of a crucial importance as it paved the way for the work of feminist geographers in the following decade.

During the 1980s feminist geography began to establish itself within the academia as a branch of geographical studies. Previous geographical research by feminists had proved that geography was a fertile discipline/ground to delve into examining questions of space, place and gender issues. Subsequently, feminist geographers started to look for new approaches that would enable them to push further in new directions rather than adding a new dimension (Women and Geography Study Group 11). Three topics in particular have since the 1980s been, and still remain, specific to feminist geography. First, the discipline undertakes the study of spatialising the construction of identities. This notion encompasses the relationship between space and gender in the construction of identity. Second, an emphasis is placed on contextualising meanings of places in relation to gender. This is a dual process which simultaneously takes into consideration how place modifies female subjectivity and how the process of making meaning of place is gender-specific. Third, one of the key aims is to demonstrate how gender as a social construction intersects with other categories within particular spatialities. This implies that gender as a societal category intertwines with other socially constructed categories as class, race or ethnicity.[9]

[8]Also see Linda MacDowell's comments on early feminist endeavour to grant women equal opportunities in the public sphere in chapter 2, "Feminism and Geography: Theory and Practice", in *Geography and Gender: An Introduction to Feminist Geography* (Women and Geography Study Group 24-39).

Doreen Massey's work on the dynamic interplay between the social relations of class and the social organisation of production has been particularly important. Her volume *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) situates geography at the heart of social studies considering spatiality and social relations. Bringing these three issues together – spatialising identities, contextualising meaning of place to gender and gender intersecting with other socially constructed categories – it is arguable that feminist geographical research proves a feasible theoretical framework for any research engaging in themes concerning space, place and gender.

A present concern for feminist geographers is how women, albeit their position on the waged labour market has improved, are still conditioned by gendered restraints that establish a direct link between the home – the domestic area – and women. Nancy Duncan recalls how earlier generations of feminists strived for greater access to the male-dominated public sphere seeing themselves as the other in juxtaposition to the male elite while late-twentieth-century feminists recognise

> that there can be no pure public spaces in which the liberal ideals of equality, impartiality and universality are achieved. In liberal theory the necessary homogeneity could only obtain if subjectivity (which is seen as stemming from particularities of bodily difference) were excluded and objectivity thus sustained. (Introduction 2)

Since the 1990s broader feminist debates have started to question the unity and singularity of knowledge. Thus, in this context, feminist geography "explore[s] the nature of gender relations, the construction of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between patriarchal and class structures in time and place" (Kofman and Peake 314). The public sphere has traditionally been the realm of reason and therefore implicitly white, bourgeois, able-bodied, male and heterosexual (Duncan, Introduction

2). In other words, the public realm could be read in terms of a heteropatriarchal space that sustains oppression and exclusion of deviant categories. In order to get a holistic view of gendered subjectivity we must regard gender in conjunction with social space because how we perceive, conceive and experience space in the practices of everyday life condition our view on gender.

Susan Stanford Friedman stresses the importance of moving beyond gender, but not in the sense of abandoning it. She acknowledges Elaine Showalter's efforts in establishing notions as gynocriticism and gynesis as key practices within feminist critical thinking.[10] Nevertheless, Stanford Friedman points out that they "share an emphasis on sexual difference and a privileging of gender as constituent of identity" (18). The scholar urges for a development of feminist criticism returning to consider gender identity from a new spatialised perspective. She refers to it as "locational feminism" and describes it as a terrain that moves beyond gender and differences taking into account the contradictory, fluid and multiple nature of identity (Stanford Friedman 10). Therefore, the spatialising of identities – one of the three key topics established by feminist geographers in the 1980s – remains a central and highly relevant theme in contemporary gender studies concerned with gendered space, as researchers try to work out the reasons why women are identified and/or identify with certain spaces.

Other critics, like Gill Valentine, Vera Chouinard and Ali Grant, stress the importance of reconsidering gendered space from a new perspective that is less partial and exclusionary by questioning the prevalent heterosexism and ableism within feminist criticism. Chouinard and Grant define ableism as "any social relations, practices and

[10] Stanford Friedman explains how the two terms gynocriticism and gynesis are indebted to Elaine Showalter's work on women writers and have had an immense impact on literary studies. Showalter used gynocriticism to denote historical studies of women writers as having a distinct literary tradition. This is a subject the critic also considered in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1982), in which she uncovered a previously neglected tradition of women writers. The term gynesis, as borrowed from Alice Jardine, deals with the disruption of male dominance within Western master narratives that women's writing caused (Stanford Friedman 18).

ideas which presume that all people are able-bodied" (171). Moreover, these critics refer to class, gender and race as "the trinity" and note that radical geographers have fought for long to have the importance of these categories recognised. Nevertheless, silences still withstand when it comes to issues concerning disabled, queer and age-related groups like elderly or children and therefore "[radical feminist geographers] often fail to recognize ableism, heterosexism and ageism as significant sources and structures of oppression" (Chouinard and Grant 171). As Duncan points out, "these differences are not only gender differences, but cultural and historical differences within gender, including sexuality which itself appears to be as variable historically and culturally as does gender" (Introduction 5). Thus, when considering women in the context of Lefebvrian representational, or lived, space, it is not only a question of considering woman beyond the trinity of gender, class and race. Importantly, it is necessary to consider womanhood in terms that stretch far beyond heteropatriarchy, which implies a compulsory heterosexism and ableism to discover how the social production of space affects the sense of belonging of other socially constructed minorities as lesbians or physically and mentally disabled.

I have earlier pointed out that gender and space are both socially constructed categories. Feminist geographers try to work out how these two categories intersect in the production of identity studying the spatialising of construction of identities. This implies to examine in which way spatial structure conditions gendered space. More specifically, in feminist geography woman's consciousness – how she perceives her own role, and how that role contributes to her identity and meaning – are central factors. Massey draws attention to how space is not only gendered but also mirrors and affects how gender is constructed and interpreted:

> the limitation of women's mobility in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things – limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other – have been crucially related. (179)

In this sense, feminist geographers are particularly interested in how spatial constraints affect gendered belonging and the ways this is manifested. Spatial, locational, time-geographic aspects are therefore especially important to consider concerning the spatialising of identities. These three notions overlap in the construction of identity as the spatial dimension in the context of female subjectivity is concerned with the public/private dichotomy as a highly artificial and gendered division, which is moreover place-specific and subject to temporal constraints, as I will develop later.

As previously mentioned, the spatial division between men's and women's spheres has traditionally been aligned with the public and the private respectively. Generally, we associate the idea of gendered realms with the Victorian era when the increasingly urbanised, industrialised and modern society took form and shaped social organisation of families. McDowell argues that

> [a]s cities grew over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this spatial division between the public and the private, between those with a legitimate right to the public arena and those who should be excluded, was enshrined in theory and in practice, in the state and in legislation, and in the definition of citizenship and civic values. Thus the urban civic arena – the public spaces and state institutions – was constructed as an exclusive rather than an inclusive space, and the notion of citizenship itself took a spatially constituted form. (109)

Although the quote above describes a nineteenth-century urban environment, the ideological separation of spheres and socio-legal paradigms of exclusion have prevailed far into the twentieth century. Second-wave feminists opposed to women's unequal opportunities, and claimed that their restricted access to the public sphere limited women to the home. These uneven terms were directly linked to socially inscribed gender identities. Moreover, the twofold divide of the public and the private as professional and intimate realms respectively falsely epitomises the domestic realm as a private space, especially for women. Feminists were growing aware of the socio-political limitations that were artificially inscribed on female gender roles and consequently resulted in a gendered spatial belonging or dis-belonging.[11] A key concern for feminist geographers is

> [to attempt] to understand the basis for, and consequences of, the separation of 'male' and 'female' spheres in cities, the division of 'public' activities from 'private' activities, and to place an analysis of the changing relationship between domestic and waged labour at the centre of a feminist urban theory. (Women and Geography Study Group 45)

Therefore, issues concerning the way spatial structure reflects and reinforces women's social position lies at the heart of the process of spatialising identities. The inherently patriarchal tradition of separate spheres rests upon ideas that link natural functions of the female body to socially inscribed roles of femininity. In a study of women's activity patterns, geographers have proved that time-geographic restrictions condition women's access to job locations because they are strategically planned according to gender roles. J Tivers notices that certain societal restraints are embedded in pre-determined social

[11] There was a growing awareness among women in the nineteenth century when several improvements were made thanks to early feminists' struggle for women's rights – for example Caroline Norton who managed to reform legal rights of divorce and custody. For detailed information see Atikson's *The Criminal Conversations of Mrs Norton.*

roles that for women are directly bound to the social expectations of their family role (qtd. in Women Geography Study Group 91). In other words, women have traditionally been, and are still, associated with caretaking roles linked to the socially expected behaviour of motherhood. The study of how these socially assigned parts are reflected in the spatial structure of society is one of the pillars of feminist geography.

Considering the notion of gendered belonging and dis-belonging, Fenster suggests that it is men's and women's spatial knowledge of certain environments that make them perceive a sense of belonging (242-43). Therefore, women's access to and mobility between certain spaces condition female subjectivity. More so, drawing on Charlotte Bunch's arguments of the public/private dichotomy as an artificial division that invokes female subordination and exclusion from the public, Fenster claims that "women's spatial mobility is very much dictated if not controlled by these cultural symbolic meanings of space" (246). Both social circumstances and personal experience are in this sense crucial factors for how women make meaning of their role in society and how they perceive whether they belong or not within specific spaces. For instance, women are generally seen as more vulnerable to dangers like sexual harassment or assaults than men.[12] Consequently, both the gender-specific upbringing girls have and the legal measures taken to protect women in public environments make women internalise a certain fear, and subsequently a feeling of dis-belonging, of the public sphere. Hille Koskela insists on that women's fear in public or risky environments is not an inborn quality but something that is socially imposed, and she stresses how this reveals the power structures that produce social space (261). In order to protect women,

[12] McDowell notices that according to Home Office statistics young men are frequently the victims of "random or unprovoked urban violence in public spaces" (105). Yet, many crimes are not reported by women, especially when sexual violence is involved. Moreover, if women move differently in urban public spaces than men as a measure of prevention of crime or fear, they are also less exposed to these situations. Therefore, statistics may be misleading because the numbers do not represent figures on equal terms and may hide numerous unreported crimes.

urban planners tend to situate working places close to transport stations, the home and care-taking facilities. This is primarily organised this way to facilitate everyday life and make the efforts of going to and from work as well as leaving children at school less demanding. Nevertheless, simultaneously as spatial mobility and daily responsibilities are made easier by shortening the time away from home, women tend to move within a geographical circle close to the home. As a consequence the environmental knowledge of that area is broadened and the sense of belonging to the domestic realm increases.

Vera Chouinard, Ali Grant, Nancy Duncan and Gill Valentine have drawn attention to the ways the public arenas of the city are culturally inscribed as heterosexual spaces and inappropriate environments for disabled. This implicitly instigates a sense of dis-belonging for disabled, queer or certain age-related groups as elderly or small children. Chouinard and Grant emphasise how a new gradual shift has taken place within feminist geography "to recognize the diversity of human lives and the meaning assigned to those lives" (170). Nevertheless, the critics also denounce the prevalent partiality towards a heterosexual and able-bodied within feminist geographic criticism, "[h]eterosexism refers to social relations, practices and ideas which work to construct heterosexuality as the only true, 'natural' sexuality whilst negating all other sexualities as deviant and 'unnatural' . . . including legal definitions of family" (Chouinard and Grant 171-72). This points at that heterosexual hegemony is not only perceived as the normal, but taken for granted. Divergent sexual desire is thus not accepted in the public but should instead be restricted to the private (and closeted) space of the home. In Duncan's words "like gender, sexuality is often regulated by the binary distinction between public and private [because] it is usually assumed that sexuality is (and should be) confined to private spaces" ("Renegotiating Gender" 137). Similarly, Valentine contends that having and assuming, the right to be more 'normal' in both

public and private is a heterosexual privilege (147). Yet, she suggests that breaches can be made in a purely heterosexual public space when encounters between queer persons take place and a mutual recognition occurs. Verbal and visual strategies as queer slang, references to lesbian symbols or simply a look – which Valentine refers to as the "gay(ze)" – enable the 'other' to "momentarily imagine the space as her own, producing a small fissure in hegemonic heterosexual space" (150). Hence, for minorities like disabled or lesbians the sense of belonging to the private realm is reinforced by heteropatriarchal norms that signal out physical divergence or different sexual desire as socially non-desirable.

As earlier mentioned, time implies an additional constraint on women regarding their access to the public sphere. Mei-Po Kwan identifies two types of time-space constraints that are relevant for women in particular. The first one, time budget constraint, denotes the limited time a person has to perform various activities within a day. The second, the fixity constraint, has to do with the fixed location or time that restrict a person's activities for the rest of the day (168). Urban planning situates women within a restricted area which increase their sense of belonging to the home/private sphere and subsequently a feeling of dis-belonging in the public. This is closely linked to the time-space restraints noticed by Kwan. Nevertheless, I want to suggest a third kind of temporal limitation that harbours a noteworthy relevance to the female identification with domestic spaces. As Fenster argues, spatial knowledge of the environment conditions the individual sense of belonging, which she claims to be "based on everyday ritualized use of space" insisting that the notion of belonging "has a clear gendered dimension" (244). Therefore, I consider that the time-space constraint not only influences women's presence in the public sphere, but it also stipulates a dimension of gendered belonging. This is because women are conditioned by the time

they spend away from home and the temporal economy affects their everyday life. In addition, women are to a greater extent than men limited by the contention of the day and the hours of light. I label this time- and space-specific restriction as "the daylight constraint". In this sense women occupy a gender-specific vulnerability during the darker hours of the day as they are more prone to become victims of crime, violence or sexual abuse during the nocturnal hours. McDowell stresses that women who move alone in the public spaces of the city at night can be read as less decent or less deserving women: "thus for a woman in a public place, her spatial position is used to identify assumed social characteristics and especially sexual morality" (106).

Efforts to enhance urban safety have been made and modern technological tools like surveillance cameras have been placed in several public areas in cities to increase the security of citizens, especially women, while moving about in the city. Koskela notes that the contemporary surveillance technology that means to improve urban safety by placing cameras in the streets actually becomes a two-edged weapon against crime (263-65). She refers to space under surveillance as "suppressed space" meaning that the politics of surveillance is actually a masculine culture that reproduces a patriarchal power of objectifying women by imposing a male visual power. Although surveillance cameras are meant to prevent crime and serve as a visual shield of protection, they simultaneously interfere with privacy of women in particular as they impose a visual control while out in the public. In addition, surveillance cameras create a public/private tension as they invade personal intimacy and anonymity, and thus, "the urban anonymity celebrated by some of the early urban critics is increasingly elusive" (McDowell 112). To protect women, cameras are often placed in areas where they are more likely to become victims of crime as, for example, parks, streets or intimate spaces as changing rooms. The lack of a mutual gaze emphasises women as objects of the male

gaze as they are both looked at by men in the streets and by the male controller behind the camera (Koskela 265). Thus, the over-hanging feeling of victimisation and disrupted privacy while moving in public areas reinforce women's sense of dis-belonging in public spaces. In other words, the idea of surveillance to protect collides with the notion of visual confinement as it intrudes individual/bodily space. In this sense, women in particular become subjects to the spatialising of identity. Space determines different roles and access or exclusion from certain realms. Temporal restriction, moreover, adds another spatial limitation to gendered spheres: women are not expected to move alone at certain hours of the day and in certain areas, especially not alone.

If representational space, or the lived experience of space in our daily lives, is a subjective experience, it is also a matter of interpretation. Then, the limits and borders of social space can also be inverted from being a space of exclusion to become a realm of inclusion, or transgressed by negotiation or subversion of social norms. Stanford Friedman singles out what she refers to as, "the geographics of identity" as a new positional, locational, spatial—that is, geographical—concept of identity claiming that it moves between boundaries of sameness and borders of liminality (17). The critic places a stress on the notion of borders as a liminal space, which simultaneously marks separation and acknowledges difference. Thus, at the same time as borders denote differences between individuals or categories such as nationality, gender, race, class etc. they are also perimeters of transition and blending. The scholar compares borders to bridges as they represent the possibility of passing over at the same time as they mark a separation and a distance to cross. In addition, borders specify a liminal space in-between that also becomes a site of interaction and exchange inviting in that sense for transgression, negotiation and reconciliation. In agreement with Stanford Friedman, I perceive spatial limits like borders as sites of subversion and negotiation of social

restraints. Therefore, rather than being a line of separation that singles out inclusion or exclusion, I suggest that borders represent a fluid space that is open for both literal and figurative displacement in the sense that it invites for the subversion of restrictions and the appropriation of space.

According to feminist geographers certain spaces inflect gendered identities and therefore I regard the culturally inscribed division of the public and the private as a dichotomy which epitomises a space of transition for women, culturally, socially and historically. Inequality in access to the public world has for long been denounced by feminists for forging gendered spheres, as it perpetuates women to spaces with predominantly domestic traits. In the context of spatialising identities, our identities change according to the space that is occupied.

If we regard the city as a fluid and performative entity it is interesting to see how different spaces invite for different roles. McDowell signals out different aspects of urban environments claiming that the city is composed by complex and cross-cutting movements between different urban areas. She argues that public spaces are significant in the city as arenas for multiple encounters, both familiar and strange, and play a vital role in the construction of identities "location within particular spaces affects the social identity of the occupants. Identity may be read off from the space it occupies" (109). In the following section, I will develop the concept of the city as a spectacle to explore the theatricality of the conception and perception of urban environment highlighting the performativity of the daily practices in everyday life. I will focus on how place and space are made functional in the productions of social space. My main scope is to explain the relationship between the city and its subject applying the trope of theatricality.

2.2. Geography of the Victorian Space and Gender

In previous section, I have discussed the social construction of space and gender to argue that these two categories interlock in the social production of space. I have contextualised female subjectivity with the process of spatialising identities and I will now narrow down my inquiry into space to an examination of the Victorian London. This part has been divided into two sections in which first I will deal with the production of social space against the back-drop of the city combining the view of urban space as a metaphorical stage set. The second section deals with Victorian society and the cultural underpinnings of the public/private dichotomy. As explained previously, my intention is not to carry an in-depth analysis of the social position of women. Instead, I will outline some of the main tenets of this bourgeois ideology. My main hypothesis is that women constantly challenged the gendered restrictions that supported the patriarchal framework, yet it was also enforced at several layers of society, and thus, rather than questioning its function I focus on how women circumvented the restrictions implied. In this vein, I will settle a basis of what the public/private dichotomy was and implied for women, to later question how the Victorians related to strict ideology.

2.2.1. The City as Spectacle

This section encompasses an analysis of the city as a social space in terms of spectacle and I will examine how practices of every-day life are performed in different urban settings. My aim is to expand Lefebvre's conceptual triad, which figures space is an on-going production of spatial relations, onto the idea of the city as spectacle. I will focus

on nineteenth-century London for two reasons; firstly, because it was a densely voyeuristic era and consequently Victorian London reveals its inherent theatricality at several layers, and secondly, the novels under consideration in chapter 5 are all set at this particular location and this moment in history. I will examine how the city is performed at three levels. This, I will argue, evolves in a cyclical and iterative process as the city is performed over and over again. As a starting point I will relate this to Lefebvre's triadic concept of space. As follows, I will support this idea by stressing the inherent theatricality of the city of London drawing on Peter Ackroyd's writing about the capital, to subsequently trace the theatricality of urban life in the Victorian era – its social life, literature – and architecture and describe how these three dimensions interlock in the representation of the city as spectacle. Thus, in an attempt to demonstrate how the city is interpreted as a spectacle, I will seek to examine how spatial practice, representations of space and representational space are performed in an on-going process that can be described in terms of theatricality.

Lefebvre's view on space as an on-going production of spatial relations encompasses three different levels of space, something Lefebvre refers to as "the perceived-conceived-lived triad", and groups into spatial practice, representations of space and representational space respectively (Lefebvre 40). I will examine to what extent Lefebvre's view on space is applicable to the notion of the city as spectacle. Therefore, I will focus on the following three ideas: social performance of daily practices, theatrical representations of urban space and cultural perceptions of the city as a theatre. I will argue that urban life is lived according to theatrical principles that are characterised by spectacle and performativity, and echoing Lefebvre, the city takes place in an on-going process of spatial relations. The philosopher's apprehension of triadic space as spatial practice, representations of space and representational space is

identifiable in the social process of urban life. If the city emerges in the relationship between social practice and representation of space, then, the perception of the city as a spectacle in conjunction with the concept of the urban environment as a metaphorical stage are conceptualised in the performance of every-day life.

The theatrical perception of the city as spectacle can be seen in three interlocking concepts – that can be described in terms of stage, characters, and performance – namely, those of topography, the social performance of urban life carried out by its inhabitants and literary representations of the city as a stage. These three notions hold a circular relationship of interdependency, i.e. all of them hinge on stage effects in their theatrical interpretation of the city, which, moreover, invites for a performative representation at the next level. Firstly, the urban panorama serves as a backdrop for the social life enacted in the streets. Secondly, the practice of every-day life is perceived as a performance in which urban inhabitants are actors. This in turn conditions the literary imagination of novelists who often depict the city as a stage in their work. Finally, these novels inspire urban planners who plan the city in terms of scenic effects. In other words, each stage is pending on the theatricality of the previous level, simultaneously as it spurs performativity onto the following one. This pinpoints Lefebvre's triadic concept of social space as the city is perceived and conceived as spectacle in its cultural, topographical and social practices of urban spaces. Therefore, Lefebvre's triadic space is a feasible model for a spatial analysis of the city as spectacle.

As mentioned above, the Victorian period was highly voyeuristic, hence, sight dominated over other senses. Visual forms of entertainment proliferated and the culture of spectacle stretched beyond the theatrical scene. The use of theatrical imagery for representing the city and the view of London as a stage has for centuries been a familiar concept. Ackroyd has repeatedly insisted that theatricality is the single most important

characteristic of the English capital and its citizens. This has been a familiar concept for Londoners for centuries and to consider the capital within the frame of theatricality and performativity in the view of the city as spectacle. But I am not concerned with the idea of the city as a stage like in the Middle Ages when pageants and miracle plays were performed in the streets or the Renaissance period when the concept of *theatrum mundi* was in vogue in Europe. I am interested in the performativity of London as a social space and how people engage with theatricality in their perception and conception of the city.

In an interview with Julian Wolfreys, Ackroyd contends that, "the theatrical aspect to London – and to Londoners – is enormously important, the essential theatricality to people. Now, why is this, is it because they know they're living in a city in which they have to perform" (257). This is an idea the author returns to in his volume *London: A Biography* (2000), in which the author claims, "London is characterised by an innate and exuberant theatricality" (152). In this sense, theatricality becomes an essential feature to London life as it comes natural to the city dwellers as an integrate characteristic of their environment. Nevertheless, it was during the Victorian period that the concept of the city as spectacle reached its peak in the common conscience of the people. The nineteenth century was a performative decade par excellence and became immortalised in the fiction by Charles Dickens, whose literary legacy testifies to the spectacular and theatrical characteristics of London life. Ackroyd stresses how the socio-political aspect of Victorian London combines the political with the theatrical – something he links this to a music-hall attitude which imbued the nineteenth century while it defused in the following decade when the desire to regulate and order society predominated in Britain (240).

Other authors coincide with Ackroyd in the view of city as a spectacle arguing that the city is not a pre-existing entity to be filled with people, buildings or institutions. Rather it comes into being through the functions and daily practices, i.e. it originates in its performance. James Donald claims,

> [t]here is no such *thing* as a city. Rather the city designates the space produced by the interaction of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of production and reproduction, practices of government, forms and media of communication, and so forth . . . the city is the above all representation. (422)

If we relate this to Lefebvre's threefold dimension of space, the term "representation of space" denotes the way urban planners and scientist conceptualise space and structure its different spaces to impose some sort of order. The quote above hints at the performative nature of the city and this idea is central for those urban planners who envisage the city in terms of scenic effects. Although Donald does not speak about performativity and theatricality his statement clearly pinpoints these concepts as he highlights how the topographical representations of the city are embedded in an interaction of social relations and institutional practices through time and space. Thus, cities are constantly changing; they are built, ruined, rebuilt and altered. Therefore, the idea of the city as a spectacle or a stage is so important as it closely linked to its performative nature and how we experience it through sight.

The new urban experience in the nineteenth century required new modes of representation. Lynda Nead highlights that "[the m]etropolitan experience was primarily a visual one" (57). Likewise, Nord notes that from the 1820s onwards "the city was frequently represented as a stage, as a panorama to be viewed and savored from a distance, to the 1850s when an overwhelming consciousness of the web of social

connections dominated urban description. . . " (*Walking* 13). Nord's statement serves an example of how sight was the central sense organ that was used to confront the new stimuli that the modern city incited. Although the city made an impact on people through new sights, sounds and smells, it was the visual experience that predominated, as I will argue in this section. Moreover, it was also the period when several inventions like electricity and photography were made, which points at that technological advancements often favoured sight over other senses as new devices and techniques were developed. For instance, the kaleidoscope, panoramas, dioramas, photography and automata were some of the different inventions that were aimed at visual pleasure. This mirrors the impression that the spectacular city caused upon its inhabitants. Furthermore, the proliferation of visual forms of entertainment at this particular time bespeaks the Victorian period as a densely voyeuristic era.[13]

The panorama was a large-scale optical entertainment, which represented models or pictures of different motifs. Visitors would walk in full circle on platforms that were situated on a different level than the scenery, to observe and be immersed in 360-degree images of walled canvases. In the 1830s, The Colosseum – a building nearby Regent's Park – displayed a rounded panorama of London, which took almost a decade to complete. Nord notes that it became one of the most popular sites and sights of London as the city could be seen from above, and she suggests that, "[the] experience must have helped to blur the distinction between representation and reality for the viewer and to make the city and its entertainment seen as one" (*Walking* 28). The idea of the panorama stems from the peepshow, a street performance of peeping into a box, and later it would give way for the diorama. In comparison to the panorama where the

[13] This can be traced to the manifold shows ranging from permanent displays of objects in museums of different sizes to temporary exhibitions as the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in London 1851. Here Barbara J. Black's *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (2000) and Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Glassworlds* (2008) offer an interesting point of departure for in-depth analyses of the material and visual aspects of Victorian commodity culture in the context of the rise of the museum.

observer strolled a circular platform to overlook the exhibition, the spectator of the diorama remained static while the display altered and the scenery was transformed ("Panoramas and Dioramas" n. pag.).[14] The popularity of these shows testifies to the Victorians' obsession with ocular entertainment and how the idea of the city as spectacle was embedded in the popular imagination.

In addition, new forms of popular culture as the circus and its sideshow, the music hall and *tableaux vivants* emerged as a response to the need for a new type of leisure for the masses in the working-class districts of the city. The new urban popular entertainment represented a myriad of different spectacles that offered pleasure for the audience. For instance, the music hall staged all kinds of performances, ranging from musical numbers and theatrical sketches as pantomimes to circus enactments, magical acts and mesmerism. Besides, freak show exhibits and *tableaux vivants* in particular offered scopic pleasure for the spectators. Whereas the *tableaux vivants* gave the spectators the opportunity to gaze and admire the human body for its aesthetic beauty in an eroticised context by staging classic art, the freak show provided the chance to stare at the human oddities by scrutinising their marvellous and monstrous bodies. Nevertheless, the pleasure that the spectator derived from the act of gazing at the spectacle on stage stretched beyond the theatrical scenery, and the city itself was perceived as a great theatre. In a similar vein as the audience watch a performance they take in the city through sight. Consequently, the idea of the city as spectacle is anchored in visual interpretations and representations of urban spatial practices.

Above, I have focused on the performative nature of the city and argued that sight and the visual dominated the popular imagination. As a result, people were used to interpret, or read the city, in terms of a theatre, both as actors and spectators. I have

[14] For a full description of the diorama and panorama, as well as an overview of visual entertainment devices visit *The Richard Balzer Collection*.

stressed that one distinctive characteristic of London is its theatricality, and in agreement with Ackroyd who finds this quality "innate and exuberant", I considered that the cultural life of London is abundantly theatrical. I will now take a closer look at the topography of Paris and London to see how urban planners conceptualised these capitals in theatrical proportions. Although London is the city I am concerned with, it is crucial to consider Paris as well for the reason that both capitals underwent an almost parallel reconstruction around mid-nineteenth century when the metropolises were redesigned to the purpose of modernisation, national pride and class issues. In many ways the city took the form of a metaphorical stage set where urban life could be performed and observed as spectacle. Thus, I will examine how representations of space in nineteenth-century Paris and London are reminiscent of the image of the theatre as architects and urban planners mapped out its streets and buildings accordingly.

The Industrial Revolution spurred urbanisation and in the middle of the nineteenth century Paris and London went through an extraordinary growth. As a consequence, urban planners were facing a new, complex and intangible situation as metropolitan life took shape. Taunton suggests that the unprecedented social formation in the metropolis was a side effect to the exponential growth of the two capitals (2). He emphasises that representations of space are imbedded in a discourse that interrelates class, culture and housing (Taunton 2-3). Hence, class was a main concern for the architects who planned these cities and both Baron Haussmann and John Nash, who mapped Paris and London respectively, drew upon scenic effects as they attempted to impose a new order on the metropolis. Accordingly, slum clearance determined a new distribution of the urban citizens, which resulted in a geographical division between the accommodated classes and the poor. As Walkowitz notices, in London this hierarchical division resulted in the topographical separation of the East End from the West End

(17). What is more, central Paris and London were mapped according to theatrical proportions and because of this I will focus on how Haussmann's and Nash's representations of space are mapped according to scenic effects. This theatrical imagery is tied up in the visual culture of the society the architects intended to shape. Therefore, when I approach the topography of Paris and London I will do so in the context of the nineteenth-century visual culture.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century Paris had not undergone any urban reconstruction that made the capital fit for the condition of modernisation. Emily Kirkman notes that the capital still had medieval features and the industrial revolution had turned it into an overcrowded, chaotic and dirty city, which suffered an identity crisis during the first half of the nineteenth century (n. pag.). Baron Haussmann (1809-91) was appointed by Napoleon III (1808-73) to modernise Paris in the middle of the century. The aim was to reshape the capital and transform it into an efficient, aesthetic and clean city that corresponded to the condition of modernity. Haussmann brought about visual, topographical and social unity to the city and rearranged Paris into a modern capital. Kirkman stresses that the urban planner imposed a symmetrical structure on the centre of the city by drawing a geometrical grid of boulevards and streets (n. pag.). Moreover, in order to manifest French grandeur several national monuments were strategically placed around the city at public display to arouse wonder and admiration. Similarly, Donald James highlights that Haussmann practised a "strategic beautification" of new public spaces (439). This could be seen in Haussmann's efforts to clean up the city at two levels. On the one hand, he created a sewer system that placed dirt and waste underground, and moreover, separated dirty water from clean. Subsequently, the city was liberated from the presence, sight and odour of rubbish and foul water, which also had a positive effect on public health. On

the other hand, Haussmann also cleaned up the city carrying out a slum clearance that pushed the poor to the outskirts of the city. This division of the city into districts was based on class pertinence and financial status and, as James notes, this resulted in a displacement of poverty to the suburbs regularised a new public space (439).

Taunton claims that the most important aspect of Haussmann's Paris was the new public spaces that were open for walking (7). In his consideration of the public and external spaces of the city, Taunton stresses the relevance of the *flâneur* as a 'type' of modernity "the *flâneur* requires the context of the boulevard – as a wide, public and urban space – in order to wander among strangers noticing things and encountering otherness" (11). The critic refers to the urban stroller from the point of view of French poet Charles Baudelaire, whose pivotal essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863) has established the *flâneur* as a representative figure of the modern experience of the city. Other critics coincide with Taunton on situating the *flâneur* as a key figure on the urban panorama and as an interpreter of the urban experience. Donald remarks that Baudelaire coined the term modernity to describe the pervasive and disturbing experience of newness and the *flâneur* had the ability to read the city as if it were a text and to render significance to the constant flow of the anonymous urban crowd (439-22). Similarly, Tester points out how the Baudelairian *flâneur* feels attracted to the public places and spaces of the metropolis where he carries out "the activity of the sovereign spectator going about the city in order to find the things that will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete identity" (7). In this context, the *flâneur* embodies new ways of seeing that are anchored in the concept of the city as spectacle and bound to visual pleasure. Although the *flâneur* is traditionally linked to the new urban experience of nineteenth-century Paris, it is a character that could be spotted at practically any urban setting.

Generally, there has been an over-extension of the Baudelairean concept of the *flâneur* within critical theory dealing with the city. Walter Benjamin's interpretation of this figure in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, first published posthumously in German in 1969, is partly responsible for the importance given to the urban stroller in critical theory and has moreover popularised the figure of the *flâneur* in contemporary research that focuses on the urban experience. Mary Gluck goes further than so in claiming that the critic "almost single-handedly recovered the figure of the *flâneur* in 20th-century criticism" (54). Indeed, Benjamin's work is extensively quoted and his thoughts on the *flâneur* have been crucial for the development of this figure as a critical tool in the analysis of urban experience. I have earlier mentioned that the *flâneur* is closely connected to Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris. The architect's project was to turn the medieval capital into a modern metropolis by restructuring and beautifying the topography. The city was carefully designed and structured in wide boulevards and arcades, which in turn created an ideal cityscape for the culture of *flânerie*—the culture of strolling and observing the urban scene for pleasure. The urban figure of the *flâneur* was the representative character of this urban practice par excellence. Rebecca Solnit argues that "the flâneur [sic] did not exist, except as a type, an ideal, and a character in literature. . . no one quite fulfilled the idea of the flâneur [sic], but everyone engaged in some versions of flâneury [sic]" (200). Taken this into consideration, I want to stress the importance of understanding the *flâneur* as a symbol or metaphor of urban life.

Elizabeth Wilson notices that the earliest discussion of the *flâneur* dates back to 1806 when the word appears in an anonymous pamphlet describing a day in the life of M. Bonhomme, "a typical *flâneur* of the Bonaparte era" (94). She proceeds to outline five distinctive characteristics, which later could be found in the writings of Baudelaire,

among those his predominantly aesthetic interest and how he derives pleasure from looking at the spectacle of urban scene (94). According to E Wilson's description M. Bonhomme serves as a kind of prototype to the Baudelairean *flâneur* who reveals "deeper meanings of the urban spectacle and the *flâneur's* apparently inconsequential existence" (108). Although the critic mentions two different types of *flânerie*, she does not offer a clear distinction between them. Instead, she acknowledges the first as a model that later would develop into the latter, who was a more refined version of the artistic interpreter of the urban scene.[15]

If we analyse the inherent theatricality of London from a geographical perspective it is noticeable that the topography of Victorian London was also structured according to theatrical principles. Although, the restructuring of London started in the early decades of the nineteenth century, I will focus on how the urban backdrop was mapped out during the reign of King George IV (1762-1830) and finally completed in the Victorian era. George IV had started a grand scheme to rebuild the capital during his reign 1820-30 with the help of the three architects John Nash, John Soane and Robert Smirke who together would transform the West End of London under the supervision of the king (Nord, *Walking* 25). The beauty and grandeur of the London was enhanced, and whereas the Parisians experienced Haussmannisation and urban beautification, something similar happened to London. Nord signals out how Nash's picturesque conception of the city as a pleasure ground for the aristocracy was supported by the imagery of panoramas and had a certain Parisian air (*Walking* 25). A slum clearance

[15] Mary Gluck calls for the need of a redefinition of the concept of the *flâneur* as a generalised symbol of urban experience arguing that his ambiguous identity, "pose a complex problem for the cultural historian [and] requir[es] both theoretical as well as historical recontextualization" (53-54). In order to achieve this, Gluck provides a detailed description of two different types of Parisian *flâneurs* that could be spotted at separate points in history, which she refers to as the popular *flâneur* and the avant-garde *flâneur* (54).

took place here as well since the upper classes started to worry about the proximity of the working classes:

> London's architecture and layout were conspicuously failing to reflect the city's growing in importance on the world stage. It was increasingly crowded and smelly, with the rich of Mayfair rubbing shoulders with the poor and disreputable of Soho. There was a growing feeling that something had to be done. ("John Nash's Plans" n. pag.)

In the middle of the nineteenth century the upper and middle classes felt an urge for a geographical separation of the city that divided the wealthy from the poor and John Nash was appointed to solve this problem. In a similar vein as Nord, Ackroyd notices that this architect "disguised a concerted effort at town planning, dividing the poor of the east from the wealthy of the west, by creating streets and squares which represented the principles of 'picturesque beauty' by means of scenic effects" (*London* 154). Moreover, he highlights how these improvements coincided with the period of the great panoramas and dioramas of London (Ackroyd, *London* 155). Thereby, the idea of urban spectatorship and the city as spectacle are inscribed in the representations of space. In this sense, the city is structured as a backdrop where performative spatial practice and theatrical representations of space invite for the representation of city life form entertainment on a metaphorical stage.

A side effect to the separation of classes into different districts was that the working class was removed to the filthy and impoverished areas of the city where squalor, crime and social injustice governed. The decision to relocate the poor into specific and separate areas had been taken by the upper classes as they worried about the habit and inhabits of the working classes and the effects it may have upon themselves. Curiously, the bourgeoisie also felt drawn towards the outcast in strange

ways. Koven claims that slumming reflects "an insistent eroticization of poverty and [the middle class'] quest to understand their own sexual subjectivities" (4). In London it became a habit among the middle and upper classes to venture into the slums for immoral pursuits, amusement or philanthropic work. This practice was commonly referred to as slumming and turned into a fashionable habit among ladies and gentlemen in the Victorian period. Koven remarks that the bourgeois interest in the London rookeries was incited by voyeuristic curiosity and the search for "illicit pleasures [like] sex, drugs, penny gaffes and music halls (9, 14). In the 1880s mapped excursions in groups were organised in the London rookeries as Whitechapel and Shoreditch (1). This was a practice that crossed the Atlantic as well. Chad Heap refers to slumming as a "new urban pastime" and notices how "the latest London trend" became a fashionable habit among New Yorkers in the 1880s (17). Whereas the wealthy Londoners turned the rookeries into tourist sites, the rich New Yorkers visited the immigrant districts. In both cases, both men and women from the accommodated classes found the slum district as a source of amusement and derived voyeuristic pleasure from gazing at the poor.

Nevertheless, the reason for mingling with the poor was not always sparked by the well-to-dos' eagerness for visual entertainment. In many cases, charity workers and philanthropists visited the slum areas because of social concern. In fact, much altruist work was carried out in order to improve the situation of the poor. Walkowitz argues that middle-class ladies frequently visited poor families to teach the mothers domestic virtues and skills, simultaneously as they manifested concern for women who suffered from abusive husbands or other cases of social, sexual or moral disorder (*City* 54-55). Even though philanthropic work was not aimed at entertainment as the kind of slumming described above, spectatorship was an integral trait of charity as well—this is an idea I will explore in section 3.1.2. The middle and upper classes' interest in and

concern for the poor envisions what Nord refers to as an overwhelming awareness of the complex web of social connections (*Walking* 13), which I have mentioned above.

Up to the moment, I have shown how the intrinsic performativity of London is a view favoured by several scholars. Whereas Ackroyd approaches the metropolis from topographical, cultural and social dimensions from a historical perspective, Taunton focuses on geographical representations and class in the context of modernisation. As stated above, the Victorian period was an optic era during which people derived pleasure from looking in particular. Thus, an array of visual entertainment forms developed, yet, the act of looking stretched far beyond the theatrical stage. I have argued that the city itself was perceived as a huge stage set, and as an example of an urban spectator I have singled out the *flâneur*. In addition, the geographical separation divided classes into different areas and in doing so, the rich turned the poorer areas into a playground, tourist site or backdrop for altruistic work as they went slumming in the rookeries. Thus, class was a decisive factor to decide on different roles in the context of urban interpretation and social display. In this chapter I will later consider representative social figures and describe how they play different roles depending on the social space they belong.

The media and literature at the time was imbued by the theatrical perception of the city. Generally, visual representations dominated textual imaginations of the city; both journalist and urban novelists described the urban environment and daily life in ways that appealed to sight. On the one hand, the immense popularity of newspapers like *Illustrated London News* (1842-2003) and *The Illustrated Police News* (1864-1938) pinpoints sight as favoured over other senses. Nead remarks that the mass popularity of illustrated press is due to the technological improvements in engraving and printing which lowered the cost of periodicals like the *Illustrated London News* (57). Today, the

archives of illustrated periodicals are a valuable access to Victorian culture for contemporary readers as they open a window to the nineteenth century. In doing so these texts together with their engravings literally provide insight into the world of the Victorians offering glances at the past through sketches and pictures. On the other hand, the act of reading in itself enabled people to take a closer look at distant parts and different lifestyles with detachment. The textual representations of London both drew upon and stimulated the readers' desire to have a closer look at the urban scene by using strategies that were based on the ocular experience.

As Nord suggests, "we can read about the most dangerous characters and parts of London and remain perfectly safe, keep our participation vicarious, even voyeuristic, sit by the fireside, see 'LIFE,' and emerge unscathed" (Nord, *Walking* 33). Thus the act of reading can be compared to a performance in which the visual imagination of the writer and the reader intersect in a theatrical perception of the city.

Several Victorian authors favoured this view and the concept of the city as a huge stage set was reflected in their work. For instance, Charles Dickens's career and work envisage how the Victorians pictured the city as a scene and the legacy of the author recreates an elaborate image of nineteenth-century London that derives from its inherent theatricality. Ackroyd remarks that Dickens's familiarity with the city and its people still conditions the way we imagine London and the Victorians,

> no author has ever known, or described, London as well as Charles Dickens . . . his eye for detail and his gift for characterization peopled [his novels] with a often varied cast of implausible Londoners, but ever since they have moved and entertained readers throughout the world who might never have been to the city. Many of the clichés that crowd our imaginations when we think of London, or of

> the Victorians, can be traced to his writings. For many readers, Dickens *is* London. (Introduction 9)

His remarkable skill for social description is something the author developed during the early years of his career when he frequented the streets of London to gather material for his writing. This is reflected in his literary representations of the city and its inhabitants, and in fact, Dickens's description of London has marked our imagination of the city in several ways. Ackroyd insists on Dickens's role in the shaping of London as a metaphorical theatre in which city dwellers are all actors and players, by claiming that Dickens read the city as a great theatre that offered glimpses of strange dramas and sudden spectacles that later filled his imagination (*London* 152-57).

Dickens's work is generally imbedded in a visual context, and accordingly, Grahame Smith notices that, "[t]he structural imagery is crucial to his texts" (60). The scholar focuses on how the author engages with two popular forms of visual entertainment in particular to invoke his contemporary social world and represent setting in terms of a spectacle, namely the magic lantern and the panorama (Smith 53). As a matter of fact, Dickens's creative ability as an author is inseparable from the social life of his time. His literary imagination was marked at an early stage of his career and stems to a great extent from his observations of the daily life in the city. As he wrote about scenes from every-day life of Victorian London, which is also the subtitle of *Sketches by Boz* (1836), he developed his genius for social description and characterisation—a stage in Dickens's writing, which Ackroyd distinguishes as the *rite-de-passage* towards becoming the author to dominate the nineteenth century (xi).

Jonathan Potter goes one step further and suggests that *Sketches by Boz* is comparable to the Victorian panorama. He singles out three major similarities between the collection of scenes and the visual display: detail, scope and the desire to see all.

First, he suggests that the wealth of detail in Dickens's textual description of London characters is comparable to the act of glancing at the picture of the panorama. Second, Potter suggests that the way the different textual portraits in *Sketches by Boz* constitute a collection of stories that purvey the idea of the city as a whole, the momentary looks at the panorama constitute a whole picture that represents an overview of the city. Last, the critic explains how the word panorama derives from Greek and conveys the meaning of the desire to see (*pan*) all (*horama*). Then he links this to Dickens's depiction of different areas and figures from all layers of society in *Sketches by Boz* (Potter n. pag.). Potter's argument puts a stress on the visual and describes how the ocular experience is emphasised both in the context of display and reading. Even though he offers a good description of the resemblances between the panorama and Dickens's sketches, his argument is flawed, as he fails to recognise the importance of theatricality and performance in these urban representations.

In one of the urban sketches described by Boz, Dickens uses the trope of theatricality as the urban crowd beholds the arrival of the criminal as if watching a spectacle. The passing couple spontaneously joins the group of observers: "on our return from a lounging excursion the other afternoon, when a crowd assembled round the door of the Police-office, attracted our attention – all evidently waiting in expectation of some arrival (Dickens 322). The van arrives with two adolescent sisters who, according to the description, are unmistakably prostitutes. While the elder sister uses coarse language and holds her head high, the younger covers her face by the shame of being exposed as a prostitute and turned into a public spectacle. The passage stresses the notion of the city as spectacle as it describes the harlot's progress into a life of crime and vice:

> A melancholy prospect, but how surely to be realised; a tragic drama, but how often acted! Turn to the prisons and police offices of London—nay, look into the very streets themselves. These things pass before our eyes, day after day, and hour after hour—they have become such matters of course, that they are utterly disregarded. The progress of these girls in crime will be as rapid as the flight of a pestilence, resembling it too in its baneful influence and wide-spreading infection. Step by step, how many wretched females, within the sphere of every man's observation, have become involved in a career of vice, frightful to contemplate; hopeless at its commencement, loathsome and repulsive in its course; friendless, forlorn, and unpitied, at its miserable conclusion! (Dickens 324)

Contrary to Potter, Nord gives heed to the theatricality and performative aspects of Dickens's writing arguing that, "[i]n a larger sense, literary representations of isolated urban encounters—as well as graphic sketches or street types—share with panoramic views of the city the element of theatre or spectacle" (*Walking* 21). Therefore, it is noteworthy how Dickens's vision of London encompassed a profusion of theatrical metaphors (Nord, *Walking* 49). I have earlier mentioned that the act of reading about urban encounters offered the reading audience the possibility to obtain glances of the city from a safe distance. Thus, people from the accommodated classes could approach socially inferior characters and impoverished areas with detachment. Yet, with *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens also introduces a new set of urban figures for the upper classes by depicting people from all layers of society and places in his sketches. In one way this collapsed class boundaries by approximating members from different social layers to each other. Similar to the slumming experience the reader could observe the outcast, but in this case without any physical contact. Still, as Nord argues, it

established a link between the subject and the reader, mainly by putting an emphasis on a form of amusement that fostered a familiarity and knowingness rather than an alien spectacle (*Walking* 50). This way Dickens managed to diminish the distance between people from different classes. Moreover, the author succeeded in inspiring empathy or even to accomplish identification between humans. In Nord's words, "whereas the urban observers of the 1820s converted the everyday scene to theatre, Boz transforms theatre into the ordinary and unremarkable.[16] Spectacle itself is demystified and the distance between spectator and the city is diminished" (*Walking* 63). This way, Dickens anticipated the "overwhelming consciousness of the web of social connections [that] dominated urban description" in the late 1850s, which I have referred to earlier (Nord, *Walking* 13).

To conclude, as I have described in this section, the Victorian period was a densely voyeuristic period and the ocular experience of the new urban scene predominated. The view of the city as a stage and the notion of urban life as a performance that was enacted on the metaphorical scene of the city, London in particular, came to dominate the cultural consciousness of the era. I have argued that the trope of theatricality engages with Lefebvre's triadic principle of space, in which space is perceived, conceived and lived according to the principle of the city as a spectacle. By considering how the popular imagination conditioned spatial practice I have focused on the inherent theatricality of London life, and emphasised how its inhabitants felt a particular attraction to ocular experiences. This is something I have linked to how urban planners and architects alike have represented urban spaces in terms of theatrical strategies to create aesthetic beauty and a modern scene. Moreover, textual

[16] The popular *flâneur* represents a social type who reads the urban panorama the other embodies a creative process, which denotes a liberating potential: "[he is] concerned with the teeming variety and multiplicity of social types" (Gluck 55) and intention to recreate a panorama of modern life. In an English context, Charles Dickens's *Boz* is a typical example of the popular *flâneur* who observes and writes about the social and representative characters that could be spotted on the urban scene.

representations of the city puts into practice the popular view of the city as a stage set through literary staging of urban life on the city's panorama. In short, the theatrical, performative and spectacular pervaded every aspect of city life and in an on-going process reminiscent of Lefebvre's production of social space as the city is interpreted, staged and enacted as a spectacle. Therefore, instead of being a mere backdrop, the city is performed as a functional and social space in which its inhabitants construct their identities.

Recently, literature that questions women's exclusion from the public sphere has emerged, yet, the question to what extent women could participate in the public life and spectacle of the city oscillates significantly depending on class and social role performed by women. In the following section I will focus on women's social position in Victorian society in relation to the public/private dichotomy to later analyse how different urban figures used different strategies to appropriate a female space in the public sphere.

2.2.2. Space and Gender in Victorian Culture: The Public versus the Private

The Victorian era is associated with the ideal of domesticity and separation of male and female spaces into the public and the private respectively in the contemporary cultural imagination. These ideals were rooted in legal, socio-political and literary constructions of masculinity and femininity, and have subsequently reached us in different textual records and testimonies that are steeped within a male bourgeois frame. The political and legal status of women altered during the Victorian period and women's social status changed slowly as the century progressed. The aim of this section is to cover a wide scope of time and themes ranging from legal conditions to medical interpretations of the female sex to give a panoramic view of the Victorians' apprehension of the public and the private as gender-biased. Rather than providing an in-depth analysis, my intention is to settle the basis of the key tenets of the public/private dichotomy to later narrow down my analysis in subsequent sections to specific urban figures who challenged this ideology-infiltrated norm. First, I will take a look at women's legal status and how this circumscribed her socio-political role. Then, I will argue that women's role was both reflected in and rooted in literature of some renowned authors as John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill. Finally, I will consider the nineteenth-century view on female sexuality.

Considering the nineteenth-century woman in English legal history is to consider her as somebody with hardly any voice within the domain of patriarchal supremacy. According to the common law, married women had no identity apart from their husbands, and a popular saying went: "husband and wife are one person, and the husband is that person" (Holcombe 4). Nevertheless, the socio-political underpinnings of the English common law rested on patriarchal values rooted in the ideology of domesticity. Thereby, the inequality in educational opportunities for men and women

was a fact as women's access to higher education was limited. Women could not take a university degree until late 1870s and consequently, they were declined access from legal, medical and political professions. In other words, women were excluded from any public or official exercise of power and male values permeated the legal system as they dictated the law.

During the first half of the century women had no influence at all in the legal apparatus, and the lack of women's rights was a reality inscribed in the legal code of coverture. The English common law regulated the status of woman to an inferior rank as she was always covered by a male superior, either father or husband. Lee Holcombe remarks that the law inflicted practical hardship on women because they were regarded as possessions of her husbands, and thereby deprived of independence, identity and self-respect (3). In fact, married women had the same legal status as criminals, lunatics, and minors—in other words "legally incompetent and irresponsible" (Holcombe 7). According to the legalese of coverture, an adult unmarried woman was defined as *feme sole* in contrast to the *feme couvert*.[17] Single women could manage their private property and sign documents. While women were minor or remained unmarried they would be kept under the family's protection, and when married they would pass onto the hands of the husband. Women held a spousal inferiority in relation to their men and legal regulations placed wives under total control of their husbands. All her belongings, legal rights and even the children were considered as male possessions. According to the code of coverture, a man gained legal rights over his wife's property at marriage as well as any property she acquired afterwards. Although, a husband could not "alienate his wife's real property entirely", he subsumed legal control over it and any other income deriving from her possessions belonged to him (Shanley 8). Subsequently,

[17] The legal terms *Feme sole* and *Feme couvert* derive from French legalese and mean literally "woman alone" and "covered woman" respectively. The latter implies that woman is under the legal protection and responsibility of her husband.

patriarchal legal regulations allocated women under male authority, depriving her of voice and independence. Instead, as Judith Walkowitz notices, "[women] lacked the cultural and political power to shape the world according to their own image. Although they tried to set the standards of sexual conduct, they did not control the instruments of state that would ultimately enforce these norms" (*City* 7).

The legal system rested on patriarchal constructions of femininity and sexual puritanism reinforced the subjection of women. For instance, during the first part of the nineteenth century, men could divorce their wives accusing her of adultery whereas women lacked this legal right until the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in 1857. However, this law did not put the spouses on equal terms. While the husband only had to prove his wife's adultery with the help of a witness, the wife had to prove her husband's guilt in combination with incest, bigamy, cruelty or neglect. Moreover, a divorced woman would lose all her possessions and the custody of the children. The divorce case of Codrington v Codrington and Anderson caused sensation in Victorian London when Admiral Henry Codrington accused his wife for adultery with Colonel Anderson. In her defence, Mrs Codrington denounced her husband for neglect and attempted rape on a friend to the family (the feminist Emily Faithful). In fact, this was the first time in English legal history that a wife took advantage of a new legal rule to make counter-charges at her husband's suit for divorce (Roulston 2).

The writer and social reformer Caroline Norton (1808-77) had paved the way years before when she fought for the legal guardianship of her children. Mrs Norton suffered from an abusive and cruel husband and when she separated from him, he responded with denying her any contact with their children. However, the marital dispute of the Nortons had started further back in time when Mr Norton suspected his wife of having an affair with Prime Minister Lord Melbourne. Norton charged

Melbourne for engaging in criminal conversations with his wife—a legal euphemism for sexual relations in the Victorian period. It was a complex case that involved Caroline Sheridan (the granddaughter to Richard Sheridan), her husband George Norton (an honourable Member of Parliament) and the British Prime Minister Lord Melbourne. The underlying political motives on behalf of Norton, a Tory, to overthrow Melbourne, and with him the Whig government, were obvious and they did not prevent him from going public with their private lives.

Nevertheless, if Caroline Norton lacked a voice within the legal system, she was able to make her voice heard other ways. She was a skilful writer and she spent the rest of her life campaigning for women's cause publishing pamphlets, books and other writings. To her horror she discovered that her husband, still after being separated, had the right to her earnings. Since they were still legally married Norton was in charge of his wife's possessions and according to the doctrine for coverture her income was attached to her husband. Caroline Norton's legal struggle for the right to see her children led to the passing of the Infant Custody Act in 1839. Karen Chase refers to this act as the first attempt in English legal history to reform family law (40). Although children were considered to be the natural property of the father, this act altered the exclusive rights of the father to mutual offspring as children under seven would remain in custody of the mother in case of separation and children out of wedlock were considered as a purely maternal responsibility. Chase claims that this was the first step towards the legal reform that would take place during the Victorian period concerning matters as married women's property, divorce and custody of children (40). As the century evolved, the legal status of women was being called into question and several acts were passed in an effort to improve spousal equality in the English common law. Yet, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that married women's

legal status changed thanks to the passing of several laws such as the Matrimonial Causes Act and Infant Custody Act. Between 1870 and 1893, a series of acts concerned with married women's property were passed. The struggle to improve married women's status is, according to Holcombe, one of the earliest airings of the women's-rights question (14). Married women's property law was a heated debate in Parliament between 1868-70, and the press followed it closely as it "attracted widespread comment" (Holcombe 14).

The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 is often referred to as a magna carta for women as it reduced the power of the husband. Shanley highlights that this act granted married women the legal capacity of acting as independent legal personages, which consequently underscored the notion of coverture (115). As married women were able to handle her own economic issues the act ensured her an increased spousal equality. Earlier acts had been criticised for diminishing men's post-marital obligations towards their ex-wives on the cost of women's rights. Married Women's Property Act stipulated that married women had the right to the control their own property and liable for her own debts.[18] At the same time as she could handle her own income and property, she could also be sued and held responsible for her legal acts, as she was her newly gained rights implied legal accountability. Although several advancements were made, women were still inferior to men in the eyes of the law. To understand the female legal status thoroughly it is important to be familiar with the feminine ideal that the upper and middle classes promoted. The law and cultural codes of masculinity and femininity were entwined since both were circumscribed by social normativity. Women were

[18] One of the legal defects of the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 was that a husband was freed from liability to his wife's premarital debts albeit he acquired her property upon marriage. However, an act passed four years later restored a husband's liability for his wife's premarital debts (Holcombe 20-22).

legally discriminated in the sense that the law upheld restraints on women that were rooted in culturally inscribed gender differences.

Traditional interpretations of the public/private dichotomy as gender-biased associate the private, the home, with women. Whereas the public sphere was the realm of production and consumerism, the private sphere was a safe retreat of domestic harmony. This dual apprehension of space as divided into separate and gendered areas can be traced back to the eighteenth century. Griselda Pollock states that the nineteenth-century socio-cultural division is a continuation and development of "the eighteenth-century compartmentalization of the public and the private" (*Vision and Difference* 67). She notices how the public sphere was defined as the world of productive labour, political decision, public service and justice and became increasingly exclusive to men (Pollock, *Vision and Difference* 67). In turn, the private sphere, or the home, was the place for wives, children and servants. The Victorian family was organised according to this division between the public and private. In the same lines as Pollock, Shanley notices how women presided over the home while men "sallied forth into the public realm" (3). Thus, the Victorians tended to view the home as a retreat of female nurturing from a public male-dominated world of capitalist enterprise and fierce entrepreneurial rivalry. More so, according to the normative apprehension of separate and gendered spaces, the home was a safe haven for women in opposition to the streets that were socially, morally and sexually dangerous.

Judith Walkowitz insists on the vulnerability of women in her study of Victorian London entitled *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992). The scholar notices how especially women were targets of sexual harassment and crime when moving around unprotected in the streets (*City* 50). The public/private dichotomy often makes contemporary readers wrongfully associate

women with a total exclusion from the public realm. On the contrary, women did move around the city, yet in a limited manner as they held a much more exposed position than men. For instance, bourgeois ladies who went shopping would sometimes venture out in the commercial districts unchaperoned. Their physical aspect and rich apparel made them visually different from prostitutes. Yet, these fallen women soon adapted strategies of disguise wearing expensive clothing to pass as middle-class ladies and thereby avoid the police. Parallel to this, shopping ladies were sometimes confounded with prostitutes and therefore also sexually harassed by men (Walkowitz, *City* 50-51). In this sense, in opposition to the streets that were socially and morally dangerous for women the home was seen as a safe place from corruptive forces.

The notion of nineteenth-century society as publicly and privately separated imbued the domestic culture at large. Nevertheless, Victorian ideology was not restricted into a spatial crystallisation of a male public world of the streets and a female private ambience of the home. Instead, this binary ideology rested upon a whole system of divisions and subdivisions with permeable limits. Judith Flanders has carried out a thorough exploration of the Victorian home and draws the conclusion that the house was divided into different public and private areas depending on the function of each room. As an example she points out that the drawing room was a public space within the private sphere as it was aimed at display (9). Thus, this room exhibited an outward representation of the family in a double sense. First, it was the largest and best-furnished room decorated with exclusive and expensive furniture to indicate the family's wealth. Its principal aim was to be a showroom, both of the financial success of the husband and the good taste of the wife. Second, it was a space of social reception where the accomplished ladies of the house were supposed to receive and entertain visitors. Therefore, the Victorian drawing room was situated on the ground constituting

the core of the house where the private met the public. In this sense, the public/private dichotomy permeated the whole of bourgeois society; the home opposed to work, the internal division of the family, the spatial division of the house and the different functions of the rooms.

Nevertheless, the domestic circle was in general a woman-centred space. Walkowitz, for instance, remarks that the home was a female domain as wives and mothers managed household issues (*City* 55). Even though the man was seen as the head of the family, the internal relationships of the family attributed women certain domestic responsibility and control of household matters. However, women were subsumed under male juridical authority (Shanley 4). Hence, within certain limits, women were able to negotiate a certain degree of power and independence as long as they responded to the domestic ideal. Another fact that points at a central role of women within the home are the widely-spread domestic manuals, conduct books and popularity of women's magazines at the time. Victorian impresarios were well aware of women's position of being in charge of the household budget. The rise of consumer society can be traced back to this period, and Lori Anne Loeb remarks that there was a shift from production to consumption in mid nineteenth century (33). The scholar refers to Victorian middle-class wives as "consuming angels" arguing that the husband was supposed to acquire money while his wife was in charge of investing them in objects that indicated her "superior understanding of taste, status, or utility to the domestic sphere" (Loeb 34).

Several critics, Walkowitz, Loeb and Lynda Nead among others, stress the liminal position of the female shopper in Victorian consumer society.[19] Middle-class

[19] In *The City of Dreadful Delight* Walkowitz notices how shopping ladies moved around late-Victorian London and consequently represented a female presence in the public sphere. For more information on shopping ladies see Lynda Nead's *Victorian Babylon* (2000) and chapter 2 in Lori Anne Loeb's *Consuming Angels*.

ladies and women belonging to the *nouveau riche* had money and transport means at their disposal to venture out into the city to the shopping districts. Loeb highlights that shopping was an activity in which bourgeois women were able to "exercise a considerable degree of free choice" (34). Nevertheless, these "consuming angels" also formed the target audience of the majority of trademarks. The domestic status of women as the managers of the household economy placed her in the focus of marketing strategies and often addressed female consumers directly. As mentioned above, Flanders claims that the Victorian home was not exclusively a private realm and the public routinely invaded the domestic circle. In her study of Victorian advertisement, Loeb points out that the inside world of the Victorian private life was constantly penetrated by commercial campaigns (129). At the same time as the house was an outward showplace of social standing the home was also invaded by stereotyped imagery of the Victorian family and a heavily romanticised imagery of female roles and feminine behaviour.

Nineteenth-century advertising techniques reinforced the public/private dichotomy in several ways reaching its fullest expression at the turn of the nineteenth century (Loeb 26). The prevailing imagery of domesticity in adverts relied heavily on idealised picture of woman as the angel of the house. Peaceful and homely settings where women and children were in focus where common and men, on the other hand, were likely to be represented as marginal characters. Men were also symbolically placed in the centre of the picture alluding to the idea of man as the head of the family. Loeb notes that Victorian advertisers were anxious to represent the view of the home as a private and isolated sphere in which women recreated a separate sphere of casual warmth in their role as protective wives and mothers (21-23). In other words, Victorian commercial interpretations of domesticity engaged with the cult of true womanhood.

According to the Victorian cult of domesticity women were expected to represent four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Self-sacrifice and grace were other characteristics a woman was supposed to fulfil and her mild nature and maternal instinct made her the angel of the house. This concept makes direct reference to Coventry Patmore's narrative poem *The Angel in the House* (1854), which was dedicated to his wife. In this poem woman is described as the moral and spiritual centre of the home and as a figure wholeheartedly devoted to husband and children, "Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf /Of his condoled necessities / She casts her best, she flings herself" (Canto IX: I). This acclaimed ideal granted women the power of moral guidance and spiritual superiority within the domestic realm "as long as she ministered to the comfort of her husband, tended the children, managed the household, all was well. However, when she began to assert herself beyond the domestic realm her special powers became equivocal" asserts Vanessa D. Dickerson (29).

Other literary interpretations of womanhood that have conditioned both the Victorians' view on themselves and our contemporary imagination of Victorians are John Stuart Mill's and John Ruskin's works. Both Lori Anne Loeb and Jeannette King signal out *The Subjection of Women* written by Mill in 1869 as a key text concerning women. In this work, the author argues for an improvement of the legal status of women. At the period the social values were strict, but this also gave room for different legal, political and social reforms. In fact, *The Subjection of Women* was written during the political upheaval and heated debate in Parliament between the 1868-70. Therefore, it mirrors the contemporary view on women from a double perspective, the one officially held by the law and another alternative angle that questioned female inferiority. Mill's philosophical essay approaches female freedom from four different

angles: economic, political, intellectual and personal. As he favoured women's right to vote in this text, he has been recognised as one of the earliest male feminist in England. Above all, Mill argued for a companionate relationship between the spouses at the same time as he cherished the idea of sexual complementarity.

Often seen as Mill's direct opposite, John Ruskin, author, art critic and social thinker, among other things, is partly responsible for our inherited view of the fixed gender roles of the Victorians. Especially two of his texts have been identified as the pillars of nineteenth-century idealisation of femininity and masculinity: his classic work *Sesame and Lilies* and his lecture "Of Queens Gardens", both produced in 1865. On the one hand, Loeb claims that, together with Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* has shaped the feminine ideal in the nineteenth century (33). Ruskin's works are concerned with the differences between masculinity and femininity and attribute them separate spheres relegating woman to the home while man is linked to the public realm. The Ruskinian interpretation of womanhood identifies woman with the duty of homebuilding but he also insists on the importance of cultivating her mind. This way, the author places woman within the domestic sphere but also acknowledges that her role is not trivial and limited to decorum. Nord points out that Ruskin repeatedly makes attempts to distinguish and define the different natures (Nord, Introduction xvii), talents and obligations of men and women drawing attention to statements as "each complete the other" (par. 68) and "they are in nothing alike" (par. 67) (Nord, Introduction xvii). On the other hand, Jeanette King makes reference to Ruskin's classic lecture "Of Queen's Gardens" where he refers to home as a sacred place and woman as its guardian (9).

Mill and Ruskin are often understood as polarised oppositions of the feminine ideal. Whereas Mill is linked to early feminism, Ruskin is perceived as a man with

antifeminist ideals. Kate Millet for instance refers to *Sesame and Lilies* as an antifeminist text and claims that "Of Queen's Gardens" is an embarrassment to twentieth-century liberalism (qtd in Nord, Introduction xvi). As an answer to Millet, Deborah Epstein Nord remarks that the meaning of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* has still not been exhausted, as it is such an ambiguous text. In the Victorian period it was a popular work and it came to constitute one of the basis of the social consciousness of privileged classes as, using Nord's words,

> Victorian parents offered it to their daughters as a primer for virtuous and altruistic behaviour, schools awarded it as prize to encourage academic seriousness and success, women activists found in it the justification they needed to work outside the home. (Nord, Introduction xxii)

Although it has been identified as an antifeminist work by twenty-century feminists, the critic maintains that "[i]ts popularity in the nineteenth century suggests, perhaps, that it registered as both a conservative and a subversive statement about the roles of men and women" (Nord, Introduction xxiii). Nord's recent study of Ruskin sheds a different light on *Sesame and Lilies* and offers a new and innovative perspective on his ideas. Still, literary imagination shaped our stereotyped imagery of Victorians. Those women who failed to meet ideological representations of femininity became targets of social disapproval.

In the late 1960s and 70s, scholars began to look into the previously neglected field of sexuality within Victorian studies by posing new questions concerned with nineteenth-century sexual behaviour. Steven Marcus's work on pornography in this historical period was published with the befitting title *The Other Victorians* (1966). This volume deconstructs stereotyped images of the Victorians in two steps. Firstly, Marcus reckons William Acton's writings on sexuality as representative of the official middle-

class opinion. Secondly, the critic contradicts this perspective by revealing the existence of extensive pornographic material and a widespread subculture of eroticism. William Acton (1813-75) was a medical doctor and an author who published several volumes on themes such as the reproductive organs, prostitution and moral issues.[20] His writings were highly influential and, albeit his treatment of prostitution spoke in favour of humanisation and rehabilitation, his volumes on the matter caused great anxiety over social hygiene among the middle and upper classes (Marcus 6-7). This would provoke a strong urge to supress prostitution among the respectable classes and new legal measures were taken. This is an idea I will return to in section 3.1.3. in regard of the prostitute and the Contagious Diseases Acts. However, Barry J Smith highlights that Acton was also criticised by his contemporaries, among other things for drawing source material from scandalmongering journalists and personal experience (185). Therefore, Acton's perspective is not necessarily representative of Victorian values. Precisely for this reason some critics find Marcus's volume flawed because it parts from the presumption that Acton's opinion is equal to the official view on sexuality.

Yet, I find *The Other Victorians* a valuable source because the volume reveals Victorian views on sexual behaviour and double standards to later deconstruct its applicability to society in general. Even though Smith criticises Marcus's volume, he acknowledges that the condescending stereotype of the Victorians includes a "male dominance of the family, strict differentiation of sex roles, separate standards of morality for males and females, female coldness in marriage, and general silence about sexual matters, all tainted by hypocrisy" (182). Acton's books testify to the Victorian notion of female asexuality as well as revealing the general acceptance of moral double

[20] Among Acton's Works there are volumes with ringing titles such as, *The Functions and Disorders of the Urinary and Generative Organs in Both Sexes* (1841) and *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspect in London and other Large Cities and Garrison Towns, with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Attendant Evils* (1858).

standards. Marcus bases his argument on the fact that in Acton's writing on sexuality women are only mentioned twice, and when spoken of, the topic is only addressed concisely. In addition, Marcus contends that the doctor generalises all women into middle-class wives (32). As a consequence, Acton's assertions are associated with class. Acton is worthy of quoting at length, because if we question that his thoughts are representative of nineteenth-century views on sexual behaviour, we must admit that they are indeed partly responsible for our stereotyped vision of the Victorians as prude and hypocritical moral defenders. The following passage illustrates the general interpretation of female sexuality in medicine at the time, which I would argue, was mainly based on moral misinterpretation of women's desire and male doctors' lack of knowledge of the female body. The following excerpt from Acton's *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* speaks for itself,

> I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind. What men are habitually, women are exceptionally. It is too true, I admit, as the divorce courts show, that there are some few women who have sexual desires so strong that they surpass those of men . . . The best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel. As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far better be relieved from his intentions. . . . The married woman has no wish to be treated on the footings of a mistress. (145)

Simultaneously as Acton denies that the Victorian wife had any sexual desire, he asserts that men did, and had mistresses (who often were courtesans) to satisfy their needs. The

quote is also interesting in the context of female space, because it pinpoints at the domestic sphere as woman's place and as a harmonic realm for men. In other words, the fragment is a suitable example of the concept of the angel in the house. I have earlier mentioned that this feminine ideal originates in Patmore's poem published in 1854, and Acton's book was published shortly afterwards in 1867. Also, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* was written during the time Ruskin's works *Sesame and Lilies* and "Of Queen's Garden" were published (1865). All of these three texts withhold a clear patriarchal discourse about woman's place.

Jeffrey Weeks remarks that the nineteenth-century sexual regulation rested upon the public/private dichotomy and Victorian morality was premised on a series of binary divisions such as family/society, domestic restraint/promiscuity. Moreover, he notices that this strict ideology was reflected in sexual attitudes and conditioned the social organisation (Weeks 81). These sets of divisions also established a double standard as the strict ideal of domesticity implied social and sexual repression imposed, especially, on middle-class culture. I wish to stress the relevance of class in the context of domesticity and sexual behaviour. As explained above, Marcus showed that Acton overgeneralised his opinion to middle-class wives. Following Marcus, other scholars directed more attention to other layers of society by switching the focus to the working class where the sexual mores turned out to be radically different from bourgeois normativity, and so did the public/private dichotomy. Hence, Marcus opened up new lines of research when he interrogated the homogeneous view of Victorian sexuality and uncovered previously neglected existence of erotic subcultures. Similarly, Smith remarks that British moralism was never complete and there existed an array of unconventional and eroticised content in literature, street ballads and music-hall songs which managed to surpass attempt of suppression (184).

Lately, studies of the relationship between subcultures and class transgression have turned their attention towards the practice of slumming. This was a widespread phenomenon in the Victorian era, when middle and upper class citizens ventured into the slum areas for different reasons. Nearly all of the motives for visiting the poor districts were tied to activities related to pleasure and sensationalism, but also philanthropic work. Seth Koven describes it as "a form of urban social exploration, [that] bore the obloquy of sensationalism, sexual transgression, and self-seeking gratification, not sober inquiry and self-denying service to others" (8). In this sense, the concept of slumming yields pejorative connotations. Still, I propose that slumming can be divided into positive and negative modes of interpretation. On the one hand, destructive forms of slumming are linked to the view of the lower areas as entertainment sources for pleasure seekers. This includes sexual exploitation of the inferior classes and social voyeurism to satisfy sexual desire and class curiosity. On the other hand, constructive practices that promote social welfare include social journalism and philanthropic work.

In the context of Victorian sexuality, the impoverished areas of the city provided a space where men from the middle-classes could find relief from strict bourgeois mores. Slumming was common in London where men went pleasure seeking in rookeries such as Whitechapel and St Giles. These were areas of substandard housing and social squalor, and also two frequent haunts for prostitutes. Koven argues that people's interest in "the slums [were] somehow bound up in their insistent eroticization of poverty and their quest to understand their own sexual subjectivitites" (4). Although Koven speaks about the slums in terms of tourist sites, he also acknowledges the underlying sexual drive that provoked slumming. Hence, this pinpoints the specific geographical areas of the city populated by marginalised citizens, as spaces that

rendered sexual outlet beyond class and gender possible. These urban places of sexual transgression were overlooked due to the working classes lived under their proper set of social norms, which ensued other sexual mores than the ones upheld by the middle classes. In addition, I propose that this reveals that bourgeois normativity was not applicable to all layers of society, mainly because the ideal of domesticity was dysfunctional among the labouring families.

Weeks has delved into the specific sexuality of the labouring classes and notices that industrialisation and urbanisation had tremendous impact on the working-class family and the role of women within it (57). The conditions of the working classes and their family lives have altered their sexual mores. Their experience of daily life was different and so were their view on sexual behaviour and respectability. The scholar stresses that pre-matrimonial intercourse was widely accepted and permanent attachments without legal binding occurred frequently, in fact, "free sexual unions for women were indulgently regarded" (Weeks 60). Therefore, the difference in courtship norms and marriage patterns attributed chastity different meanings to working-class women and middle-class ladies (Weeks 61). Similarly, Smith links the strict social mores of sexual behaviour to the genteel and argues that the practice of chaperonage was a matter of class (183). The opposed social mores and views on sexual behaviour were supported by different life-styles that were regulated by the social condition of each class. What is more, the doctrine of separate spheres was not only inconvenient, but hardly suitable for family units that depended on women's labour outside the home for survival. Several working-class women were forced to recur to temporary prostitution when economic hardships required so. Occasionally, women's sexuality was the key to her survival and members of her same class were often lenient with prostitution. It is therefore arguable that the vast majority of hostile attitudes towards

this profession came from the respectable classes. Moreover, Marcus remarks that Acton attempted to convince the genteel that the prostitute was not a monstrous creature but a human being (5). Of course, Acton disapproved of prostitution on moral grounds and his concern for fallen women were rooted in aiming to extinguish this social evil.

Acton was partly responsible for the introduction of legal control on sex trade and the acts are to a great extent based on his study of prostitutes published as *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspect in London and other Large Cities and Garrison Towns, with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Attendant Evils* (1858). In the moral lines of the proper Acton, this legal regulation applied to woman alone, ignoring that way the possibility of men being bearers of venereal diseases and for infecting women with syphilis. Walkowitz asserts in the preface to *Prostitution and Society: Women, Class, and the State* (1980) that when she began researching in Victorian sexuality and prostitution in the late 1970s, little scholarly attention had been paid to the subject and it was at the time emerging as a legitimate subject (Vicinus, "New Trends" vii). This volume covers an important gap in history examining the effect of the Contagious Diseases Acts on prostitutes and the socio-political responses it provoked in Victorian England. Even though Marcus had treated the subject a few years earlier, he did so in the context of Acton's impact on the official view on sexual behaviour in the Victorian period. Vicinus takes up where Marcus left off and provides an in-depth analysis of the legal regulations on sex trade.

The initial aim of the Contagious Diseases Acts was purify the nation by controlling and diminishing the spread of venereal diseases by forcing prostitutes to submit themselves to medical examinations. Because of this, Keith Thomas suggests that the acts represented "the double standard of sexual morality" (qtd. in Walkowitz, *Prostitution* 70). Walkowitz asserts that the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts

has wrongfully created the impression of a "more programmatic and coherent social policy than was actually the case" (*Prostitution* 69). The laws faced a heavy opulence and several feminists worked intensely to have the Contagious Diseases acts repealed. However, the consequences of these legal restrictions had the social backlash of reinforcing the distinction between respectable and disrespectable behaviour. Women who occasionally had turned to prostitution for survival had earlier been able to avoid the social stigma of being a fallen woman due to the tendency to oversee this practice by other members of her class. Yet, as Weeks notices, the enforcement of the Contagious Diseases Act implied public shamings, registration lists and enforced reformation or even prison for women who had worked as prostitutes (90). Thus, one of the consequences for prostitutes, whether permanent or temporary, was social ostracism as women feared to be noted down on the register list by association (Weeks 90). Although there are no official dates of the total amount of prostitutes, estimate numbers are dispersed and range from 7000 or in between 50.000-80.000 in mid-Victorian London. Several critics point out that these numbers, although uncertain and random, testify to a vast market for sex trade. In addition, this is an example of Victorian double standards and hypocritical social mores. In this sense, the figure of the prostitute epitomises the controversial view on female sexuality in the nineteenth century.

The idea of women being asexual human beings was a cultural misbelief that was inscribed in the medical discourse at the time. Robin Gilmour notices how science, literature and theology shared a common discourse in the nineteenth century (*The Victorian Period* 111-12). Jeannette King supports this idea arguing that the religious idealisation of womanhood reinforced her as disembodied, chaste and spiritually rich. She argues that the religious interpretation of woman "underpinned the division of Victorian womanhood into polarised extremes of 'madonnas' and 'magdalenes', a

distinction which – however simplistic – played an important part in the popular imagination" (King 10). Hence, women were either the angel in the house—subordinated to man, passionless and driven by her maternal instinct, or a fallen woman—promiscuous, un-motherly and immoral. Consequently, sexuality was considered to be incompatible with femininity and Darwinian speculations on the female body ascribed her as a sexually passive. This implied that scientific speculations on the female body limited women's reproductive system to the biological functions of the female body, such as childbirth and nursing babies. Those women who manifested erotic desire openly or in ways that were digressive from heterosexual norms could easily fall into the category of fallen women, i.e. prostitutes. Moreover, in extreme cases other deviant forms of sexual behaviour could even be linked to lunacy or hysteria.

Nevertheless, Victorian sexuality is a complex area, as it rested upon rigid moral codes and a socially established prudery at the same time as pornography flourished and prostitution was more propagated than ever. The available images of Madonna and Magdalene placed women in a special position, and this imagery of female sexuality conditioned the nineteenth-century medical theories. Elaine Showalter's study of the Victorian medical discourse in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1987) gives insight into the ideology that lies behind the nineteenth-century feminisation of psychological illnesses. In medicine, the female body was especially prone to mental illnesses as women's corporeality was distinguished for holding a special link between the brain and the uterine system. Showalter notes that, "theories of female insanity . . . were linked to the biological crises of the female life-cycle—puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause" (*The Female Malady* 55). Thereby, doctors contended that women's reproductive system interfered with their sexual, emotional and rational behaviour, which also made them

more vulnerable to insanity than men. Thus, the belief of an inherent inclination towards insanity among women was based on a male misreading of female corporeality. In addition, this medical position was imbued by social mores that went in the lines with Acton's perspective. I have earlier pointed out that this medical doctor disbelieved that women possessed sexual desire. The popular view on female sexuality was circumscribed by the authoritarian voice of medicine. Although Acton spent several years as a gynaecologist he only recognised the possibility of female sexuality in lunatics that were prone to nymphomania: "I admit, of course, that the existence of sexual excitement terminating even in nymphomania, a form of insanity which those accustomed to visit lunatic asylums must be fully conversant with; but these [are] sad exceptions" (144).

Yet, as Showalter remarks, during the period of the rise of the Victorian madwoman, women were either patients or limited to secondary professional roles as midwifes or nurses which subsumed women to medical authority in every possible sense (*The Female Malady* 53-54). Acton was only one of the experts belonging to what Showalter calls "moralistic, domineering, and masculinist doctors", a label which suits him accurately (*The Female Malady* 121). If sexual desire in women was a rare exception, then what explanation was given to non-reproductive sexual manifestations that transcended both views on sexual behaviour and gender relations? Weeks states that homosexuality has evoked serious hostility and been socially condemned at various periods, "it has been increasingly recognised that the social not only defines, but actually in part constructs deviance" (97).

Showalter draws attention to how many Victorian women undermined the binary division of gender roles and sexuality, a group she defines as "odd women" (*Sexual Anarchy* 19). This label does not necessarily refer to lesbians because there was a vast

surplus of unmarried women at the turn of the century. It is noticeable though that the odd woman posed a threat to the Victorian nuclear family of father, mother and children because she represented an alternative to the heteropatriarchal family unit. One of the key arguments for suffragists who fought for the right to vote was that unmarried women lacked legal representation, and in juxtaposition to the married woman who under the doctrine of coverture was represented by her husband, single women constituted a new political and sexual group (Showlater, *Sexual Anarchy* 21).

The categorisation of single women that did not fit into the social structure for different reasons as odd women coincides with the new definitions of sexuality. Thus, odd women included unmarried women, lesbians and feminists who questioned outmoded domestic roles and sought to redefine themselves beyond traditional family structures. Their independent lifestyle also stirred the social consciousness, in particular for questioning the social categorisation of their women as intellectually inferior to men in their demand for access to education, more rights and the right to vote. Their struggle for the same legal conditions as men stirred unease among defenders of the domestic ideal because it inferred masculine traits onto women, which also questioned their sexuality. Nevertheless, on the one hand, sexual passivity as celibacy became an important empowering ideal as female asexuality proved them spiritually superior to men. On the other hand, single women transformed this passive role into one of active and passionate social service and legal struggle. Thus, as Vicinus concludes, "[w]omen did not reject the Victorian myths but reinterpreted them" (Vicinus, *Independent Women* 5).

At the end of the century women's passionlessness was questioned and new definitions of sexuality appeared. Legal regulations and control of sexuality led to a growing awareness of both female sexuality and homosexuality. Nevertheless, as

Weeks notes that legal restrictions on homosexuality applied to men only and the public indifference towards lesbians was anchored in the dominant notions of female non-sexuality (115). It is true that the lesbians were omitted from legal control, and in agreement with Weeks, I would add that it was accepted as long as it did not interfere with male sexual identity or the male family role. Similarly, Showalter highlights how Charles Taylor, one of the few medical doctors that publicly acknowledged female sexual desire, suggested reading or exercise as outlet for their desire instead of masturbation, premarital sex or lesbianism (*Sexual Anarchy* 22). Thus, female sexuality was tightly tied to social categorisation of gender difference and it was first in the 1880s when professionals took heed of lesbian desire. Then, lesbianism was attributed with highly masculinised characteristics and lesbians distinguished for mannish behaviour and dress. Doctor Karfft-Ebing, describes the lesbian woman in a mannish way, "[u]ranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men. . . . also in opera singers and actresses who appear in male attire by preference" (qtd. in Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 23). Female sexuality, lesbianism included, was increasingly recognised. However, women's sexual identities would still remain eclipsed by male notions of gender differences.

3. Urban Categories in the Victorian City

The scope of this chapter is to unveil how female urban figures in the Victorian era destabilised the public/private dichotomy by transgressing the boundaries of cultural constraints imposed on gender difference. My principal aim is to explore how these women contextualised their identities in the spatial practices of every-day life. The chapter has been divided into two parts according to the different spaces they treat. On the one hand, I analyse how the street as a space open for women's experience and I consider the prostitute and the philanthropist as two representative figures. Focusing on their urban experience in the context of walking, watching and subjectivity, I will link them to the figure of the *flâneur*. On the other hand, section 3.2. provides insight into Victorian popular culture and how female professional performers utilise entertainment spaces to assert agency in the public realm and in doing so subvert the patriarchal gender norm. In that section, my main focus is directed towards the female performer and how gender and space are socially constructed and performative.

3.1. The Streets: The *Flâneuse*, the Philanthropist and the Prostitute

In this section I will delve into public spaces of the city to take a closer look at female urban strollers. The figures under consideration are the *flâneuse*, the philanthropist and the prostitute as these women pose a challenge to the ideal of domesticity as they did walk the streets, which subverts the idea that the urban experience was male par exellence. I will take the concept of the *flâneur* and question the often-asserted idea that he could only be male. I will focus on how the city as a public space open for female experience and attempt to locate a *flâneuse* taking into account the gendered restrictions that conditioned her urban involvement. Then I will proceed to expand the concept of

flânerie to the philanthropist and pay heed to how this middle-class charity worker used different strategies to access the streets of the city, and argue that she derived pleasure, a sense of freedom and independence from doing so. Finally I will approach the prostitute as a liminal figure whose life was circumscribed by her social stigma, yet I will link her to philanthropy in an attempt to find out to what extent the spatial context contributed to her subjectivity. Since the philanthropist and the prostitute are both liminal figures who possess spatial knowledge of urban environment I am particularly interested in how these women managed to access the streets and to what degree this contributes to the spatialising of their identities.

3.1.1. The *Flâneuse*

For the last twenty years there has been an on-going debate considering the existence of a *flâneuse*, a female variant of the *flâneur*, and whether she is possible (Parsons), non-existent (Wolff, "Invisible" 68) or invisible (E Wilson 90) is a question which still remains open. Normally connected to Charles Baudelaire's concept of the urban stroller as an interpreter of the modern and industrialised nineteenth-century Paris, the *flâneur* also becomes an embodiment of the modern male gaze. As women could not access the streets of the modern metropolis on the same conditions as men the existence of a *flâneuse* has been questioned. In this context, Janet Wolff's seminal essay "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity" has become a key reference within this scholarly debate as the critic clearly denies the possibility of the *flâneuse* claiming that "the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" (Wolff, "Invisible" 45). However, this statement has invited for several misinterpretations of the basic idea in

Wolff's article. As the title indicates, Wolff is concerned with the female urban stroller in the context of literature and modernity, whereby she also refers to the *flâneur* in terms of Walter Benjamin's readings of the French poet Charles Baudelaire. As I have explained before, there were different types of the male *flâneur*s as well as alternative approaches to what he symbolises.

There are several facts and arguments that pinpoint that women moved around in the nineteenth-century city, observing the streets and its inhabitants, and what is more, deriving pleasure from doing so. I will focus on Victorian London, regarding it as a city where women from different classes were constantly on the move. Hence, I will examine representative female figures ranging from different classes: from outlaws like prostitutes to working-class women and actresses to middle-class wives carrying out philanthropist work in the slums or shopping ladies at the department store. In an attempt to locate a nineteenth-century *flâneuse,* I will take a closer look on women moving dangerously in Victorian London—"the city of dreadful delight" (Walkowitz, *City* ix). My main scope is to analyse how women used different strategies to escape gendered confinement to private spaces and gain access to the public realm. Therefore, rather than considering the female urban stroller on the same terms as the *flâneur*, I aim to show how their female condition shaped their view of the metropolis in terms of their own. Even though I will focus on London, Paris is also a central city for my analysis as the origins of *flânerie* are connected with the modernisation of the French capital. There are four topics in particular that are connected to the urban practice of *flânerie* – walking, watching, public space and subjectivity – and all of them are central to the way women came to terms with their role in the new cityscape in the nineteenth century. Yet, the question whether a woman could be a *flâneur* remains unanswered.

I suggest that there are three main reasons that problematise theoretical approaches to the figure of the *flâneuse*. Naturally, scholars often ground their arguments on the fact that nineteenth-century society was strictly gender-biased, and as a consequence, conditioned women's access to public spaces. This is an issue I will look into later. However, as the *flâneuse* is a derivation from the *flâneur*, we need to reconsider the male urban stroller in order to redirect the scope of the analysis. First of all, there has been an overgeneralisation of the *flâneur* to one specific and representative figure of the urban experience, which is related to Charles Baudelaire's poetry. Subsequently, I will refer to this urban stroller and observer as the Baudelairian *flâneur*. Secondly, and as a consequence of the first, this has, moreover, led to a misuse of the *flâneur* as critical assessment favouring the use of this male urban stroller as a theoretical figure. Thus, on several occasions readings of the *flâneur* fail to recognise him as a metaphor of the modern urban experience. I suggest that, once established the identity and features of the *flâneur*, we ought to consider the symbolism in his experience focusing on subjectivity, sight, movement and space in order to denote how the urban walker negotiates his or her identity. Third, in the context of female *flânerie*, the reasons stated above point at that the doubtful identity of a *flâneuse* is due to a lack of terminology that describes the female experience in the modern city. If there was a "particular mode of female urban vision" (Parsons 6), then I pose the question, should not women's experience be described and determined according to a different set of terms? In this section, I will renegotiate the symbolism of the *flâneur* to analyse how the female experience can be represented similarly, yet with some noteworthy differences.

One of the main arguments that support the idea that the experience of modernity was unavailable for women, at least on the same terms as men, is that the public sphere was a male domain. Wolff contends that, "women could not walk alone in

the city" (Wolff, "Invisible" 41). The scholar stresses that the public realm of the nineteenth-century city was so intrinsically mapped according to sexual divisions whereby "the *flâneuse* was rendered impossible" (Wolff "Invisible" 45). Throughout her article Wolff argues that a female variant of the *flâneur* was not possible because this urban stroller was an embodiment of the male urban experience and modernity; gendered conditions of "involvement/non-involvement" excluded women from the public sphere because of their socially inferior position (Wolff, "Invisible" 40). Walkowitz coincides with Wolff on this point and denotes how the public realm was presumably a dangerous sphere for women. Due to this, Walkowitz remarks, they lacked autonomy and were rather "bearers of meaning than markers of meaning" (*City* 21). At the same time these critics along with others, acknowledge the presence of women in public spaces like the streets and department store. Indeed, women were present in the city and could be seen in different spaces of the urban panorama. For instance, Deborah Epstein Nord and Lynda Nead, have drawn attention to how female figures as shopping ladies, philanthropists and prostitutes moved around the Victorian streets of London and favour the idea of female *flânerie* (Nord, "The Urban Peripatetic" 375; Nead 64-67). Nevertheless, independently of the position they take, all scholars coincide on the point that in order to move freely within the public sphere, women had to adopt certain strategies.

Lately, there has been a shift in the focus of scholarly debate regarding the inclusion and exclusion of women in the context of the ideology of separate spheres. In the foreword to *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space* (2008) Wolff contends that the dichotomous model of separate spheres persisted at large albeit being contested and defied (Foreword 16). Still she recognises that the interrogation of this ideology "illuminate[s] an oblique angle of meanings of

gender and femininity in the city" (Foreword 16). In these lines, several scholars have looked into how as the Victorian period evolved, the gendered boundaries and limitations started to blur out and women constantly trespassed socially imposed limitations. Nead defies the public/private dichotomy and argues that the tradition of chaperonage started to decline in the 1860s and was a subject of debate as it blurred the lines between fallen and respectable women, and consequently, women in general could easily be mistaken for being prostitutes by simply moving alone along the streets (64). As expressed before, although women were gaining more access to the streets, their presence was conditioned by social gendered restraints that circumscribed the public spaces of Victorian London. Walkowitz coincides with Nead on this point as she remarks that "[e]ntering public space placed women of all classes, whether shopgirls or shopping ladies, in a vulnerable position" (*City* 46). Walkowitz argues that the public sphere was linked to erotic activity and exchange, and thus, was conceived as a negative environment for respectable women and notices that the opportunities for civic participation did not expand until the 1880s (*City* 46). Similar to Walkowitz, Sizemore highlights that middle-class women could not walk the streets at any hour of the night or day like men did (2-3). Thus, in addition to spatial constraints, women faced a temporal obstruction as well since they were hindered by what I have referred to in 2.1 as the daylight restraint.

Some examples of female *flânerie* are George Sand, Flora Tristan and Elizabeth Banks,[21] who were women that defied women's assigned place to the private sphere and ventured out into the public realm using several strategies. There participation in public life and observations of the city deconstruct gendered and dichotomous models of

[21] Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* is an example of a fictional representation of a *flâneuse*.

subject/object relationships. Their *flânerie* reveal the porosity of patriarchal spatial divisions and exemplify specular elements of female urban experience.

The French author Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin (1804-76) was an extravagant woman journalist, poet and novelist who became famous under her penname George Sand. She enjoyed an unorthodox lifestyle and defied the social restraint on women by wearing men's clothes, smoking the cigar and openly taking lovers. Nord notices that George Sand wanted to "soak up with the Bohemian world of letters" and have the possibility to roam the public spaces of Paris with freedom and anonymity (*Walking* 118). By using male disguise George Sand could move incognito and blend into the crowd of people in different social spaces as the streets, the theatre and cafés. She rejoiced in her freedom to participate in the social sphere and public life of Paris and claimed, "[n]o one paid attention to me . . . No one knew me, no one looked at me; I was an atom lost in that immense crowd" (qtd in. Nord, *Walking* 119). E Wilson remarks that this enabled her to enjoy the role of a *flâneur*, which was inaccessible to women of her class (*The Sphinx* 52). George Sand became a famous writer and she led a very emancipated lifestyle compared to other women at the time. Gossip and rumour hinted at a lesbian affair between George Sand and her friend Marie Dorval. Belinda Jack remarks that George Sand's poem "La Marquise" describes sexual encounters with lesbian connotations, which hints at the author had experienced same-sex relationship herself, yet, it may have been a purely fictional experiment. Wilson considers her as a feminist and revolutionary socialist who offered a different model of womanhood, and together with Flora Tristan (1803-44), they lived independently (E Wilson, *The Sphinx* 51-52).

Wilson suggests that while the city is perceived as a male domain, women who trespass onto urban space represent disorder and a symptom of disruption (E Wilson,

The Sphinx 9). When considering George Sand and Flora Tristan, the critic refers to them as *Les Lionnes* and highlights how these women often provoked a hostile reaction with men who scorned their unfeminine behaviour, and conversely, served as a source of inspiration to other women (E Wilson, *The Sphinx* 51). Thus, this points at that women in public were tolerated as long as they did not overstep their assigned gender roles or interrupted heteronormative regulations of social standard and belonging. George Sand and Flora Tristan applied different strategies to gain access to the public sphere and wrote about their experience. Even though they were contemporaries and practised some form of *flânerie*, they carried out their tasks in different countries. Whereas George Sand was active in Paris, Flora Tristan is linked to London.

Flora Tristan's (1803-44) observations of London, *Promenades dans Londres* (1840-42), translated into English as *The London Journal of Flora Tristan* (1842), is a collection of texts and scenes that describe different activities and people from the streets of London and its official institutions. Flora Tristan carried out a stern social investigation of London society and often took radical measures to expose what she referred to as the underlying hypocrisy of a nation that proclaimed to uphold virtue and constitute liberties (Hawkes xxi). As the original title reveals, the French word *promenade* suggests strolling with leisure and pleasure. In many ways, Flora Tristan was a female variant of the *flâneur* in the sense that she walked and observed the streets and in doing so turned it into a legible experience that she later published as a text. Her visits to England between 1826 and 1839 situate her historically closer to the popular *flâneur* than to the avant-garde type. Jean Hawkes argues that Flora Tristan's writing is reminiscent of Dickens's as both show great concern for social injustice as well as the repressive machinery of legal institutions (Hawkes xxiii). Although, the Frenchwoman could be interpreted as a female counterpart to Dickens's Boz, she also reveals traits

that are characteristic of the Baudelairean *flâneur*. Nevertheless, Hawkes does not speak about *flânerie* when describing Flora Tristan's experience as a pedestrian urban observer: "The book opens with an impressionistic description of London seen through the eyes of the bewildered newcomer, followed by an essay on the then fashionable topic of climate upon mental development . . ." (Hawkes xxiii). Thus, this situates Flora Tristan in the middle ground in-between the popular and Baudelairean *flâneur* as she in a true avant-garde-like manner attempts to render the fleeting and fragmentary urban vision into a coherent image.

Flora Tristan had to face spatial restraints in London and in order to avoid these she, like George Sand, resorted to disguise. For instance, to be able to enter the House of Parliament, which did not allow female access to the building, Flora Tristan planned to use male disguise. When telling a British member of parliament about her plan the politician reacts with indignation: "My proposal had the same effect on him as had, in days gone by, sprinkling holy water on the devil! What! Lend men's clothes to a woman and insinuate her into the sanctuary of male power? What an abominable scandal. . . " (Tristan 58). When she later managed to attend a session of parliament she was recognised as a woman in men's clothing. But this was more or less overseen, as it was perceived as harmless.

She used disguise on more than one occasion to move freely in the public realm. Nord remarks that during her stay in London, Flora Tristan discovered the *saya* or *manto*, which was a special headdress used by women. She argued that this cloth offered women public anonymity and freedom to walk the streets unidentified (Nord, *Walking* 118). By escaping the male gaze they also avoided the objectifying male gaze. Nevertheless, when she tried to wear this headdress in Paris, it was seen as derogating for women (Nord, *Walking* 118). Using male attire or a headdress, she also resorted to

traditional chaperonage. She ventured into the slums to dig out information about their harsh living conditions. Nevertheless, she was obliged to go there chaperoned—not only for being a woman in public but in addition for moving along the streets at night. In other words, she was not able to move freely because of the daylight restraint.

Her visit to the rookeries to document prostitution proves that the potential sexual dangers for women in public were a fact. Flora Tristan was truly conditioned by the daylight restraint and her social status as woman. Foreseeing the risks she faces by entering the slums at night she decided to go there chaperoned by two gentlemen as, using her own words, "it is a courting danger to go there alone at night" (Tristan 83). Nevertheless, she was still unable to escape the objectifying male gaze of the men present in the streets, who addressed her as if she were a prostitute,

> several of them accosted us and asked if we wanted a room. When we answered in negative, one bolder than the rest demanded in a threatening tone, 'What are you doing here then, if you don't want a room for you and your lady friend?' I must confess I would not have liked to find myself alone with that man. (Tristan 84)

This happend in the 1840s, before the chaperonage started to dissolve and proves how the streets of London were still regulated by dichotomous structures that positioned women as not pertinent to the public sphere. Flora Tristan could not go undisturbed in the streets at night, but even though she was chaperoned by two men, she was mistaken for a prostitute, by simply being in the rookeries at night – the wrong place at the wrong time – because these were the haunts of men and women that were involved with sex trade.

Parallel to Wolff, Griselda Pollock understands the *flâneur* as a male figure who exerts power through his ocular superiority. In an interpretation of female spaces and modernity in nineteenth-century Paris, she explains this as follows:

> the flâneur [sic]/artist is articulated across the twin ideological formations of the private and public with its double freedom for men in the public space, and the pre-eminence of a detached observing gaze, whose possession and power is never questioned as its basis in hierarchy of the sexes is never acknowledged. . . Women did not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd. They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch. As the Baudelairean text goes on to show, women do not look. They are positioned as the *object* of the flâneur's [sic] gaze. (71)

Both Wolff and Pollock take up the idea of women's lack of freedom in the public sphere and the *flâneur*'s objectifying male gaze. Rob Shields states that "the *flâneur* is a figure of excess: an incarnation of a new urban form of masculine passion manifest as connoisseurship and couched in scopophilia" (64). Indeed, they held a different social position than men, and although Baudelaire is connected to mid nineteenth-century Paris, the quote above suits Victorian London too. British culture rested to a large extent upon a gendered division of society, which was circumscribed by patriarchal hierarchy.

Moreover, other critics coincide with Wolff and Pollock in a feminist approach to the Baudelairean *flâneur* as a symbol for visual and voyeuristic mastery over women. For example, Hille Koskela defines scrutiny as a form of harassment and remarks that "power relationships intertwine with the field of vision, including acts of seeing and being seen, as well as the cultural meanings of the visual and its representations" (258). In this context women's visibility in the streets triggers the feeling of being unsafe in

the public sphere. Therefore, the objectifying male gaze disrupts female privacy through the mere act of looking. Moreover, by simply appearing in the streets women are scrutinised and categorised, in according to Koskela, "a *flâneur*like manner" (259).

Taken the evidence that women like George Sand, Flora Tristan or Beatrice Webb moved in the public sphere and practised some form of *flânerie* it is interesting to take a closer look at what affinities female walking and observing hold to the male *flâneur*. Clearly, they were forced to apply different strategies of disguise in order to enter what could be described as the patriarchal domain. The relationship between power and vision is central to the notion of female presence in the public sphere as well as the possibility of the *flâneuse.* Thus, in order to locate a female urban stroller we must read her in terms of the gendered relationships that rested upon a dichotomous division of spheres together along with their object/subject relations.

Although Pollock notes that the right to look in different forms was exclusively male, the question whether women did not rejoice in visual impression of their surrounding remains open. Several scholars have challenged this idea. For instance Christine Wick Sizemore explores how women writers represent the city in their work and how the walking subjects in female fiction perceives the city in the volume *A Female Vision of the City*. Albeit Sizemore focuses on modern and contemporary women writers like Dorothy Richardson and Doris Lessing,[22] this work gives insight to the relevance of the city in the development of a modern female consciousness.

Parsons's proposal that women had a different mode of watching challenges this idea and invites for a new approach to a female vision of the city. Accordingly, Nord contends that female presence on the urban scene and her interaction in social life is conditioned by the subject's awareness of her position,

[22] Hidalgo explores female *flânerie* and the female urban experience in the context of literature of modernity. For indepth ananlysis of Dorothy Richarson's *Pilgrimage* see Hidalgo (93-98).

> [it] involves a consciousness of transgression and trespassing, of vexed sexuality, of the female body as commodity, of the unreliability of class boundaries, of the need for disguise or some form of incognito, and most importantly, of the ultimate unavoidability of the primacy of the male gaze and its power to objectify and eroticize. (Nord, "The Urban Peripatetic" 375)

The argument above displays some of the key points that problematise the existence of a *flâneuse*. The critic speaks about woman as an outsider who trespasses into the patriarchal sphere where she is objectified by the male gaze into an eroticised commodity. Nevertheless, she stresses that women's awareness of this position also provides an insight into the possibilities of disrupt spatial restraints. In this sense, while women are conscious of their social inferiority, which is sustained by the gendered power relations that imbue the dichotomous spatial structure of public/private and its respective subject/object relationship.

Wolff, Pollock, Walkowitz and Elizabeth Wilson have all drawn attention to social factors that limit women's access to public spaces and limited mobility once she enters the streets. Whereas Wolff and Pollock encounter this mobility restraint as a determining factor when arguing that the *flâneuse* was not possible Walkowitz and Elizabeth Wilson are more open towards the idea of female *flânerie*. In the nineteenth century women were still very limited by gender-biased spatial practices and as a consequence she had to adopt certain strategies to tackle socially and culturally imposed restrictions on her sex. As Nord has suggested, the social position and sexual conditions that circumscribed women's presence in the public required a specific female awareness in order to move within the public realm. Similarly, Parsons points out that "[t]he perspective of the *flâneuse* is thus necessarily less leisured, as well as less assured, yet also more *consciously* adventurous (Parsons 42, emphasis added)". In this sense,

gender-biased conditions entailed a feminine consciousness, which did make *flânerie* possible for women as well. Therefore, in order to achieve a feminist reassessment of *flânerie* we must reconsider space, sight, movement and subjectivity in the context of female urban figures.

Women's restricted accessibility to public spaces also entailed a reversal of women's exclusion from *flânerie* as it also placed her in a detached position. The *flâneur* has repeatedly been described as a man that was either a person in or of the crowd. Thus, the male urban observer has traditionally been protected by his anonymity or by his detached position from the rest of society (Tester 2-3). Consequently, the claim that women could not be *flâneur*s because of their lack of participation, presence or visibility is controversial as these are features that the *flâneur* actually embodied. Drawing on the evidence that women did move in the public sphere I propose that women's presence in the street defied the limitations that were imposed by the patriarchal normativity. In addition, the bourgeois codes of respectability were seemingly dysfunctional in working-class areas or the rookeries where women's life looked different.

Spatial boundaries were constantly crossed and blurred as women who were conscious of the gendered restraints adopted different methods to traverse the city. In doing so they were also able to appropriate a female space in the public sphere. As a peripheral figure on the social scene she observes the urban panorama from a distance that allows her to observe city life with detachment. Not in the sense that she is free from bias or prejudice, but in terms of holding separate position from the rest of the crowd. In this sense she is comparable to the popular *flâneur* who from a distance watched the spectacle of urban life: "women developing her independence in the city was negotiating both her own *and* private space" (Parsons 78).

Urban women, who were used to move within the streets, represent the woman of the crowd and as a true *connoisseur* of the cityscape she increases her agency in the public sphere. If women were vulnerable in the public sphere it also required a gender specific knowledge of how to avoid potential threats to her sex and other restraints. Her knowledge of the city and her ability to read it, were central for appropriating a female space in the city. Parsons notes that George Gissing's work *The Odd Women* (1893) describes women moving around London, and argues that the novel reveals that women were getting increasingly accustomed to the urban spatial environment, and thus, the author distanced himself from the idea that woman's place was at home (Parsons 51). The novel was published in 1893, and at the time women were increasingly perceived as a potential threat to the established patriarchal order, especially when moving in organised groups. Moreover, in *The Odd Women* Gissing "recognizes the significance of look and the influence of gender on perspective, [and] recognize[s] women's place in the public city" (Parsons 46).

Critics that put into doubt the possibility of female *flânerie* often restrict their arguments to women as the object of the male gaze, and fail to recognise women as being both possible subjects of gaze and manipulators of the male gaze. Tester stresses how the *flâneur* imposes his scopic authority onto the cityscape through his objectifying gaze (6). Moreover, the *flâneur* is generally seen as representative of, or even more radically, an embodiment of the male objectifying gaze. Yet, this idea is directly anchored in the gendered division of active/passive where woman is the objectified spectacle for the male gaze. Laura Mulvey coined the term "to-be-looked-at-ness" in her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), in which she examines images of womanhood on screen to assert that women are cast as signifiers of sexuality and objects of male desire, and thus exposed to scopic and voyeuristic desire:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (Mulvey 19)

Mulvey postulates that the gendered dichotomy of agency/passivity relegates women to the position of an eroticised object of the male gaze. However, her argument is flawed in the sense that she does not recognise female spectator and reduced her to the object of scrutiny. Her argument has been prone to criticism as she limits the spectator to "the *male* third person singular", and she defends her viewpoint affirming that "was interested in the relationship between the image of woman on the screen and the 'masculinisation' of the spectator" (29). Nonetheless, her thoughts on the male gaze have had a significant impact in the film studies as well as other fields, such as literature.

In "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)", Mulvey supplements her previous essay on the visual pleasure of cinema as it had "the male third person closed off avenues of inquiry that should be followed up" by incorporating women into the scope of her analysis (29). On the one hand, Mulvey includes the female spectator, which either represents the masculinised view or as an observer who derives a deeper and more complex desire from watching. On the other hand she considers the female character as the central actor and active agent on the narrative arena (29-30). These are ideas I will develop in section 3.2.2.

Juliette Merritt's volume *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Female Spectators* (2004) offers a well-argued theory of female spectatorship. One of her main points is that when women appropriate the position of the spectator they also enhance female agency (Merritt 8). The focus deployed by Merritt in her analysis of Eliza Haywood's spectorial fiction is particularly interesting as she is preoccupied with the structures of sight and seeing and how they relate to gender roles in a subject/object relationship. The inherent instabilities of the female role as spectacle can be manipulated into becoming a knowing spectator herself, and subsequently the female observer can exercise power within and beyond constraints of their role as objects of desire (Merritt 12). The porosity of social space enables women to appropriate the role of spectator albeit certain cultural limitations tied to her sex as has been argued with George Sand and Flora Tristan. Nevertheless, the question concerning what a specific female vision is, remains unanswered. Parsons suggests that women's perspective is less leisured and less assured, but therefore also more *consciously* adventurous (42). In a similar vein as Nord's, the critic stresses the relevance of a female consciousness. Once women assume their gender-specific condition they will gain insight to the different possibilities to deconstruct the binary model that upholds the patriarchal axiom. In this sense, Parsons proposes that a critical reassessment of figure of the *flâneur* indicates that the concept of the urban spectatorship is ambiguously gendered (42). Not only did women watch differently, but they were also perceived in new ways due to the fact that female urban figures became "[an] increasingly autonomous and observing presence" in the city (Parsons 43). Therefore, newly constructed social roles for urban women could be read in terms of being metaphors of a female perception of the city.

One of the running arguments within feminist consideration of female urban strollers is the problem of women's vulnerability in public. As a possible victim of

sexual harassment – whether being visually objectified by the male gaze, verbally accosted or suffering from physical assaults – women are more liable to be targets of abuse than men. Thus, women and men in public are perceived differently, and as Solnit emphasises: "women's walking are often construed as performance rather than transport, with the implication that women walk not to see but to be seen, not for their own experience but for that of a male audience, which means that they are asking for whatever attention they receive" (234). However, as stated earlier, women could appropriate the agency of the spectator by occupying the observer's position, and moreover, subvert the male gaze once she gains insight to the power relations it implicates (Merritt 8-9).

The *flâneur* bestows different ways of walking the city at his ease while women's walking is circumscribed by patriarchal norms. Due to this, Wolff insists that the *flâneur* is necessarily male, mainly because women could hardly pass unnoticed in the city "women in public, particular women apparently wandering without aim, immediately attract the negative stamp of the 'non-respectable.' It is no accident that the prostitute appears as central female trope in the discourse of modernity" ("Gender and Haunting" 19). Similarly, Nord and Buck-Morss pay heed to the social set of norms that regulated respectability, and subsequently, women's access to the public sphere. Generally, women in public aroused suspicion regarding sexual status solely for presence in the male public sphere (Nord, "The Urban Peripatetic" 365). What is more, while men who idled were *flâneurs*, loitering women risked being categorised as prostitutes (Buck-Morss qtd. in Nord, *Walking* 11). Nevertheless, women's participation in public life increased as the nineteenth-century evolved and the female presence in the streets became more frequent. As a result, women also walked in public for different purposes, moving to and from work, shopping, philanthropy, etc.

The figure of the public woman is generally associated with the prostitute and often used as a euphemism for whore. The question of women walking the streets has not only been a problem of legal rights and morality. It is inscribed in the language itself. The terminology of walking implies a gendered semantics that infers sexual availability or promiscuity whenever the pedestrian in public is a woman. In this sense the cultural perception of women out walking poses a problem for the *flâneuse.* For example, the word to stroll implies to walk or idle in leisure manner without any specific purpose or aim. Yet, whenever stroller appears in a feminine context it implies prostitution.[23] Thus, women streetwalkers or strollers are generally associated with prostitution. Solnit notes that in British English the term "walking out together" is linked with sexual courtship (232). All this points at the fact that women walking in public are restrained by social norms that regulate their status of respectability.

Several scholars have noticed that cases of mistaken identity were frequent in Victorian London and women were sometimes mistaken for being in the sex trade because they were walking the streets. Nead stresses that women's public presence was restricted by cultural beliefs of respectable behaviour and notices that cases of mistaken of identities were not necessarily as common as they are assumed to have been (63). Still, the fact that "perambulating prostitutes" frequented public areas sometimes caused confusion regarding the social status of streetwalking women (Walkowitz, *City* 50). Nead argues that many of the women that were wrongfully accosted were probably provincial girls with flirtatious behaviour who were not accustomed to the social norms that conditioned female public presence in the city (63-65). Similarly, Walkowitz links

[23] Marjorie Crew's article "A Neighbourhood Response to Prostitution" reveals that the word stroll is still linked to sex trade. The prostitutes themselves refer to certain areas where sex trade is common as "the stroll". As a response to the widespread procuring and soliciting that occurred openly in the streets of their neighbourhood in Chantam (Canada), members of the community took measure of organising walks to interfere with the sex trade "the word stroller was used because the prostitutes called our streets 'the stroll' and we decided that it was not going to be their workplace any longer. We took back our stroll" (n. pag.).

this to geographical areas and awareness of specific social values. The critic argues that while some women could walk freely in their local neighbourhood, they could not venture into the city unchaperoned, especially the West End and the City since they were notorious areas of street harassment of women (*City* 50-52).

Thus, Nead and Walkowitz suggests that certain gender-specific strategies had to be applied by women who wished to walk the cityscape undisturbed. For instance, respectable girls were instructed of how to avoid unwanted admirers by knowing how to master strategies that involved her gestures, movements, and pace to signal that she was not sexually available (Walkowitz, *City* 51). Nead adds sight to this argument and contends that sight is one intrinsic element in the practices of every-day life in the city: "[a]ll pedestrians are caught up in [a] network of gazes . . . if women want to escape London's web of glances they must dress unattractively, walk at a steady pace and look straight ahead" (66). Both critics coincide on the point that women must walk with a steady pace, as in contrast to the *flâneur*s aimless rambles, to signal out dignity and respectability. In this sense respectable women could neither stroll or wander the streets, nor observe the cityscape as freely ad the *flâneur.* Still, I believe that in the same way as women mastered different modes of walking to avoid sexual harassment, they also acquired a peculiar mode of observing the urban landscape.

3.1.2. The Philanthropist

Cathleen J. Hamann addresses women charity workers in the mid- and late-Victorian era in the light of the Baudelairean *flâneur* emphasising this urban stroller's characteristic features of detachment, anonymity and observation of urban life as well as his superior position (66). In her definition of what she denominates "philanthropic

flâneuses" (Hamann 82), the critic attempts to establish a link between female social workers who ventured into the impoverished areas of the city to observe the poor and help the needy with the *flâneur* stating, "she [was] able to move freely about in this urban landscape with enjoyment, isolated from the working-class residents she observes from a position privileged by anonymity and authority" (66). While Hamann stresses the philantrophic *flâneuse*'s ability to move about the city at leisure she also acknowledges that this was not always the case. Women had limited access to public areas, and when accessing them they held a more vulnerable position than men and this is a condition that persisted throughout the Victorian era. Notwithstanding, as I have argued repeatedly, women challenged these gendered restraints in several ways, and among those, philanthropic endeavour provided the opportunity to appropriate a female space in the public sphere. I have earlier singled out space, sight, movement and subjectivity as four central features to the practice of *flânerie* and I will regard the Victorian female philanthropist in light of these dimensions.

Whether philanthropic visits to the slums were spurred by religious endeavour, class curiosity or sisterly affection for the outcast, female charity workers upheld a superior position of authority that instigated a feeling of empowerment. Paula Bartley insists on the fact that ladies' associations, as for instance Ladies' Association for the Care of Friendless Girls and Ladies' National Association, held a women-centred approach that was "framed within a window of power and authority" (75). Indeed, reform institutions and organisations that aimed at helping women were often constituted and run by women which ascribed them a role of authority. As Vicinus's study has proved, women from the bourgeoisie "brought their social skill to bear upon slum work, but rather than using their education . . . they emphasized a nonprofessional shared women's world" (*Independent Women* 215). Hence, women from the

accommodated classes took advantage of their domestic knowledge and social skill by adapting their knowledge into a charity appliance, which subsequently granted them access to the public sphere. In other words, by working within the social and gendered framework that rested on a whole set of binary oppositions, women could experience a sense of independence, authority and control as they moved across the city.

When speaking about female philanthropy, critics concur on the point that it was a rare chance for women to venture out into the public sphere and exert agency. Philanthropy was multifarious and complex and several varieties coexisted, that can be narrowed down into three categories. Charity work predominantly took the different shapes of religious endeavour, cross-class help and slumming. Ellen Ross outlines the historical development of organised charity work in Britain from its beginnings as an integrate part of Church in the early nineteenth century moving on to the 1860s and mid-Victorian period when non-clerical and women-centred social organisations were popular and finally culminated in suffragist movements in the late-Victorian era.

Many reform institutions and charity organisations stood in direct connection with the Church and Christian teaching. One critic links the duty and servitude of the evangelical doctrine to middle- and upper-class ladies' vigour in philanthropic work asserting that these activities were considered "the most obvious outlet of self-expression" (Prochanska 7-9). Similarly, Koven remarks that women's charity activities contributed to the social and moral hygiene of the rookeries and this was well-established practice by the 1840s and 50s (186). This group of philanthropists wanted to spread religious teachings in the slums promoting Christian values, morality and self-help as well as offering spiritual guidance. Here, Bartley's study of the prevention and reform of prostitution in Victorian Britain gives insight to how the Church of England set up different institutions aimed at helping the outcast.

Class issues circumscribed philanthropy, mainly because charity consisted in a one-way directed support where the accommodated classes helped the poor. Nonetheless, the relationship across classes was complex and multifaceted, moreover, the rich turned to the squalor for different reasons. On the one hand, it was a matter of class hygiene and the fear of the possible consequences of working-class squalor upon the middle-classes. The accommodated classes depended on the supply from the proletariat and for this reason, their living conditions and health was a matter of concern. Vicinus notices how cleanliness, both real and its metaphorical sense, became an important symbol for the bourgeoisie and dirt came to mean both moral and cultural depravity (*Independent Women* 219). Koven goes one step further as he contends that, "these women invested the dirt of poverty with powerful political, cultural and sexual meanings" (184). As I will explore in this section, the slum districts provided a social space for women where to explore their own selves and roles in society. On the other hand, charity work and social relationships across classes were also indebted to empathy and class-consciousness. Cross-class friendships and sisterhoods were established as ladies offered advice, gave domestic instructions and sympathy (Ross, *Love & Toil* 18). Another marker of class was the practice of slumming—which I have described earlier as a bourgeois usage of the rookeries as an entertainment venue (Koven 1). This can be read in two terms: first, slumming reveals that the well-to-do derived voyeuristic pleasure from observing the outcast and consequently erotised dirt. Second, they had the opportunity to witness the squalor which enabled them to later speak about social problems with authority as they knew what they were speaking about. Independent of the kind of relationship established across classes or the reasons that aroused interest and curiosity about the slums, the "double condition" of the city marked borders that both divided and united the rich and the poor (Hamann 74).

All this pinpoints the slums as a social space were women could negotiate new roles and widen the domestic sphere into the public arena. Rather than stepping out of their assigned gender roles they "[t]ransformed their passive roles into one of active spirituality and passionate social service . . . women did not reject the Victorian myths but reinterpreted them" (Vicinus, *Independent Women* 5). In other words, middle- and upper-class women inscribed their domestic role with new meanings as they expanded their domestic duty onto public charity work. Koven suggests that "these women justified their initiatives by invoking the separate-spheres ideology and the writings of . . . John Ruskin" (186).

Consequently, women travelled through urban spaces as they moved across the city, and as Ross remarks, by the 1860s female activists gained unprecedented access to new geographical sites and social arenas while most public spaces still remained inaccessible, i.e. "respectable women in the mid-nineteenth century were formally excluded from voting and office holding, from most economic activity, and from vast majority of professions and trades. When they ventured out, they need chaperone" (18).[24] Vicinus refers to this as a "crack in the door" claiming that women who were active in charitable societies privileged independence and agency above financial reward (*Independent Women* 222). In these lines I suggest that the female philanthropist was a liminal urban figure as she was situated upon the threshold between the public and the private spheres—she was able to move in and out of the public realm in her role as an arbitrator of domesticity and morality in the slums areas.

I have argued above that women were able to access spaces that were previously inaccessible by converting the ideal of domesticity into a medium that enabled them to move freely within the streets. However, ideological work was also overtly

[24] Nead draws attention to the fact that in the 1860s middle-class women did walk the streets unchaperoned and the debate this caused in the media suggests that the tradition of chaperonage was dissolving (63-64).

transgressive as these women subverted the image of passive and submissive wives belonging to the domestic ideal. Wolff insists on the point that *flânerie* was not a respectable practice for women as their lives were conditioned by their restricted access to the streets as well as the social norms of their class ("Invisible" 19). Notwithstanding, the porosity of the apparently rigid ideological framework also contained loopholes that middle-class wives used to venture out into the public sphere where she experienced sights, movement and pleasure comparable to the *flâneur*. In other words, the philanthropic *flâneuse* was a transgressive figure who turned the slums into a space of negotiation and contestation. As Mary Poovey asserts,

> Despite repeated invocations of the domestic ideal, despite the extensive ideological work this image performed, and despite the epistemological centrality of woman's self-consistency to the oppositional structure of Victorian ideas, the representation of woman was also a site of cultural contestation during the middle of the nineteenth century. (9)

Poovey's remark invites for a discussion of how women made meaning of their roles in society and their selves through ideological work. As argued before, there are four key issues that must be taken into consideration regarding women's urban experience – public space, walking, watching and subjectivity – and all of these are central to women's subjectivity in the public sphere.

Philanthropic activities and different well-fare institutions offered women a socio-political stance in the public sphere as they gained voice and authority. Several scholars pay heed to how ideological work and reform organisations created a social space of female empowerment and agency. Poovey challenges W. R. Greg's essay "Why Are Women Redundant" (1862), which speaks about the excess of unmarried women as a problem because they could not comply with their natural role as mothers

and caretakers. The critic contends that gender roles are culturally inscribed, "[ideologies] are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern people's social relations and that, in doing so, constitute both the experience of social relations and the nature of subjectivity" (Poovey 3). Interestingly, the critic speaks about the way in which social institutions affect social life and links this to subjectivity. Similarly, Vicinus proposes that "[s]ingle women effectively altered the negative connotations of 'redundancy,' creating new models for women's public roles" (Vicinus, *Independent Women* 7). The realm of philanthropy situated women in a system of female power structures as she spoke with an authoritative voice of her own within woman-managed institutions. As a result women "gained experience in public speaking, expertise in running organisations, a measure of financial acumen, administrative, marketing and social welfare skills" (Bartley 28). In short, when women moved within the public sphere they also took active participation and this is a fact that defies Wolff's argument that women could not get involved in public life in the nineteenth century ("Invisible" 40). Although the philanthropist held a detached position in relation to the poor because of class superiority she got involved in the lives of the poor listening to their testimonials, offering advice and help to improve their situations.

One of the principal arguments in Hamann's article is that she defines philanthropic observations from the perspective of the *flâneur* emphasising detachment as one of the central similarities, "these *flâneuses* dispense with a sense of detached observation that often marks the traditional characterization of the *flâneur*" (66). Hamann sees the philanthropist as a rather liminal presence in the lives of the tenants; yet, this needs further consideration as charity work did require involvement on behalf of the rescue worker. Ross accentuates how listening was a central part of women's philanthropic engagement and proposes that "[t]he characteristic mode of the woman

observers was aural" (*Love and Toil* 18). Her volume *Slum Travellers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (2007) is a collection of written accounts by Victorian philanthropists that are written testimonies of what they have seen and heard by working-class women. The critic remarks that, "speaking and conversation also reflects the material realities of upper-class women's work in slum settings, where so many were in positions that required them to listen and to talk" (15). Many facts pinpoint that female philanthropist were active participants in the lives of the poor, which of course, questions the view of the philanthropic *flâneuse* as a detached observer. Therefore, it is also noteworthy how Ross stresses that, "the slum as *visual* spectacle was certainly an established gentlemanly mode" (*Slum Travelers* 14), and in this regard the philanthropist did hold a detached position in terms of class as it created a distance between her and the poor.

Koven approaches slum life in terms of a spectacle for the bourgeoisie and argues that women felt "deeply attracted to sights and sounds of metropolitan poverty" and engaged in charity tasks to exert social authority over the poor (183). The critic's statement concurs with Ross's notion of aural vision as he combines vision and sound as central factors. Independent of the reason behind their interest in the slums, female philanthropists were compelled by scopic curiosity to visit the impoverished areas. In lines with Hamann, Koven accents the social gap between the rich and poor arguing, "the shared domestic concerns of mothercraft and cleanliness, upon which the ideology of cross-class sisterhood theoretically rested, exposed rather than helped to resolve the fundamental conflicts separating the rich and poor women from one another" (195). In other words, although philanthropists did mingle and converse with the poor, a class distance separated them which placed the charity worker in a detached position.

Therefore, I coincide with Hamann on the point that the experience of the philanthropic *flâneuse* was characterised by a detached observation of the poor.

Visits to the marginalised areas of the city were not always justified by self-disinterested concern for the people in need, but other underlying reasons to visit the slums were grounded in class curiosity, voyeurism and the search for adventure. Vicinus, who addresses philanthropy as an empowering experience for women, admits that "[s]lum life attracted overprotected women who had wanted adventure and excitement away from their dull respectable homes" (*Independent Women* 213). In the same vein, Koven affirms that the slums represented a form of entertainment for the leisured spaces both in terms of a stage and a spectacle. First, he argues that the darker areas of London served as a playground of sexual experimentation and a haunt of illicit encounters with the poor by asserting that slumming was motivated by "their insistent eroticization of poverty and their quest to understand their own sexual subjectivities" (Koven 4). In this sense he speaks about the slums in terms of theatricality and likens this social space to a scene: "many were deeply invested in the titillating squalor of the slums, which they used as stages upon which they enacted emancipatory experiments in reimagining themselves" (Koven 5). Koven does not limit his argument to male pursuit of sexual pleasure, but also addresses the eroticisation of poverty to what he refers to as "the double optic" of sympathy and repulsion that simultaneously repulsed and attracted the bourgeoisie (4). Arguably, the rookeries represented a metaphorical scene for members of the upper- and middle classes who turned the practices of everyday life of the poor into a spectacle and the slums into a social space where to negotiate their own subjectivities. Koven also reveals how the working classes were aware of the spectacle that their poverty represented for the philanthropic ladies who visited their homes up to the point that these were even accomplices in the staging of their misery—as one

working class house wife remarks "the poor is to them what a theatre is to me" (Stevens qtd. in Koven 194). The practice of slumming in the working-class spaces of the city validates the outcast areas as a stage to act upon. Moreover, escapades into the slums added excitement and adventure to philanthropists who ventured into the dangerous areas of the city. This excitement was stimulated mainly through sight as they observed the lives of the poor as if watching a performance.

Ladies from the upper and middle classes were able to subvert the public/private dichotomy by using the ideal of domesticity as a strategy to venture out into the public sphere as philanthropists. Charity work and social hygiene institutions enabled women to transgress social and gendered boundaries and appropriate a female space within the public sphere. Borrowing Hamann's term "the philanthropic *flâneuse*" I have argued that female philanthropist showed traits of the *flâneur* as she walked the urban panorama deriving pleasure from observing the practices of everyday life in the slums as a theatrical entertainment. I have regarded this urban stroller in terms of space, movement, sight and subjectivity and drawn the conclusion that philanthropy like *flânerie* can be further divided into different subtypes, and for this reason, I suggest that rather than speaking of a figure we ought to regard the philanthropist as well as the *flâneur* as a role that is performed. More importantly, I have proposed that the *flâneuse* should be addressed in terms of her own, not on the same condition as her male counterpart. Thus, the philanthropist was a knowing spectator who could approach the poor in different guises; she fulfilled herself outside the home as a charity worker that possessed an aural vision (Ross), as a politically engaged reformist who held an authoritarian gaze (Vicinus, Bartley) or as a slum traveller who imposed her speculative curiosity on the outcast (Koven). Arguably, we can speak about the philanthropist's gaze in terms of *flânerie* by drawing a parallel between Tester's designation of the

flâneur's superior position to the rest and scopic authority over the observed to the philanthropist overbearing class position, which inevitably posited her in a detached relation to the poor. Independent of the underlying motives, female philanthropist found spatial freedom and independence as they negotiated gendered constraints and social roles beyond the private sphere.

3.1.3.The Prostitute

The nineteenth-century prostitute represents a controversial subject as she epitomises the double standards of the Victorian ideology. The prostitute contradicts the public/private dichotomy in several ways, mainly because she represents the direct contradiction to the strict normativity held by official ideology. She is defined according to her public profile and sexuality and embodies the opposite of the bourgeois ideal of femininity. In the nineteenth century she was commonly and euphemistically referred to as a public or fallen woman, and thus defined according to her physical location and lack of morality. Her social status of being a fallen woman makes reference to her fall from grace and loss of virtue, which instead associated her person with low natures as sexual drive and consequently disrespectability. Thus, she was a problematic social figure that posed a threat to the established social norms and her mere existence dishevels the hypocrisy of Victorian sexual standards.

The prostitute is generally a person who is defined according to her profession. Rather than being categorised as a woman who exerts sex trade, she is perceived as a woman who is a prostitute. As a consequence, in a binary opposition that separates respectable women from fallen women or chaste from impure, the prostitute has been reduced to a stereotype who often is regarded as a social threat to domestic harmony.

Nevertheless, the prostitute as a social group is constituted by complex subset of women who practised this peculiar trade for different reasons and the Victorians themselves were aware of this fact. Henry Mayhew's study *London Labour and the London Poor* (1840-51) distinguishes between three types of prostitutes among the elevated number of prostitutes in London:

> [w]e have before stated the assumed number of prostitutes in London to be about 80,000, and large as this total may appear, it is not improbable that it is below the reality rather than above it. One thing is certain - if it be an exaggerated statement - that the real number is swollen every succeeding year, for prostitution is an inevitable attendant upon extended civilization and increased population. We divide prostitutes into three classes. First, those women who are kept by men of independent means; secondly, those women who live in apartments, and maintain themselves by the produce of their vagrant amours; and thirdly, those who dwell in brothels. (n. pag.)

Mayhew's work testifies to the underlying complexity of the nature of prostitution and the overgeneralisation that the social disapproval for her trade has led to. Similarly, Acton argued that prostitution was not always permanent occupation, but conversely, it was often a transitory state in a woman's life. I have mentioned earlier that Acton promoted a humane vision of the prostitute, a perspective that Walkowitz recognises as a break with his contemporaries' viewpoint (*Prostitution* 46). Although Acton disapproved of the trade on moral grounds, he did favour rehabilitation and reform of women who had strayed (Marcus 5-6).

Prostitution aroused ambivalent feelings among the respectable classes for whom the prostitute was both the great social evil and a victim. Therefore, as Bartley notes, "attitudes were not always coherent – at one and the same time women were

viewed as victims, sinners and sexual contaminators" (34). Prostitution and procuring were not illegal practises (Picard 310, Bartley 4); notwithstanding, several measures were taken to suppress prostitution as it represented a threat to the family, the home and the nation. Even though Marcus claims that the Victorians turned a blind eye to prostitution (6), during the nineteenth century several steps were taken to counterfeit prostitution as it posed a threat to both the health and morality of the nation. Taking as a starting point the earliest legislative act to mention "common prostitute", the Vagrancy Act of 1824, I will move on to consider attempts to reform fallen women as well as legal efforts to stifle the spread of venereal disease, and finally take a look at how the focus shifted from reforming prostitutes to preventing women to recur to the trade.

The Vagrancy Act took into effect in 1824 and the principal aim was to restrict the mobility and presence of vagabonds, travellers and prostitutes in public areas as streets, highways and urban spaces. Although the Vagrancy Act dates back before the Victorian period, it continued in force throughout the entire century and is in fact still in vigour today. Obviously, it has been extensively amended since it came into force nearly two hundred years ago, and during the Victorian era it was amended in 1834 with regulations on the public display of obscene material. The major concern was to control public unruly behaviour and misconduct became punishable. The Vagrancy Act applied to both men and women and the principal aim was to clear the streets and public spaces from loitering people who were associated with an alternative nomadic lifestyle or immoral activities and read:

> [e]very Common Prostitute wandering the public Streets or public Highways, or in any Place of public Resort, and behaving in a riotous or indecent Manner; and every Person wandering abroad, or placing himself or herself in any public Place, Street, Highway, Court, or Passage, to beg or gather Alms, or causing or

> procuring . . . shall be deemed an idle and disorderly Person within the true Intent and Meaning of this Act; and it shall be lawful for any Justice of the Peace to commit such Offender. (83; 698)

The stress on public spaces in the passage above is particularly noteworthy, as the legalese reflects how women did not have the same access to public areas as men and above all it was considered a crime for women to loiter in the streets—an idea I will return to later. The relevance of this act is that from this point onwards, women who loitered in the streets faced police harassment and those involved in procuring could be confined in houses of correction or imprisoned.

The concern for immoral and deviant behaviour in public that lies at heart of the Vagrancy Act paved the way for later efforts of reformation and prevention of prostitution on moral grounds socially, legally and politically. First, institutionalised attempts to reform prostitutes took the shape of different charity organisations that stood in direct connection to the Church of England. It was the prostitute who was seen as the root of immorality and vice at this stage of the historiography of prostitution. Therefore, people believed that if the prostitute disappeared, so would the trade. However, his view ignored the demand, especially from middle-class men, as Vicinus remarks (*Independent Women* 70). The upper-class fear of contamination resulted in an array of social hygiene associations in the early Victorian period, as for example, the Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children (founded in 1853),[25] and the Church Penitentiary Association (founded 1852). The aim was to turn those women who had fallen into prostitution into respectable and virtuous women through reform that placed morality at the forefront. Bartley emphasises how Christian conduct and order was promoted through rigid rules and strict discipline (46-47). Even though the idea was to

[25] also known as the Rescue Society.

rescue women who had strayed from the path of respectability and purity, and fallen into a life tainted by poverty, abuse and sexual exploitation, the reformation methods were flawed and as a consequence many women fell back into prostitution.

I have argued above that the prostitute cannot be reduced to one particular type of woman, nor was there one type of prostitute. Conversely, there were as many types of prostitutes as there were women involved in the trade and for this reason reform institutions' endeavour was not always successful. In this context there are three aspects to keep in mind: the middle-class values and Christian belief that imbued the organisations, the disciplined methods applied and the alternative lifestyle offered. Bartley contends, "not all inmates welcomed the opportunity to embody virtuous, middle-class, upper-working-class and feminine values [but] . . . rejected the class and gender role allotted to them and the alleged imposition of a middle-class moral ethos" (59). This is not strange taking into account that nearly all prostitutes belonged to the working class and were brought up in a social setting that held different values, and as Weeks has suggested, different sexual mores (86). What is more, many critics coincide on the point that this kind of charity work was not always motivated by gender empathy. Bartley, for instance, denounces how reform institutions often treated the inmates in abusive and humiliating manner and enforced strict rules and disciplines (37). The inmates in penitentiaries were expected to repent for their former lives and to do penance for their sins. Turning them into respectable women also implied to bestow them with a new identity. This was achieved by cutting their hair, getting rid of personal belongings and clothes to instead dress them in plain penitentiary garbs (Bartley 36-37).

The new life that expected them as reformed prostitutes was basically a life in servitude either as low-paid domestic servants or employed in positions of hard manual work. Not all women were prepared to abandon a life in the streets for low wages and

hard labour. For some women, the path into prostitution was a meditated and voluntary decision on behalf of the woman. Liza Picard gives the example of a former-maid-turned-prostitute who worked for temporarily in order to save money and set up a business of her own (313). These cases were extremely rare; notwithstanding it is an example of the harlot's progress and ascendance on the social scale. Others, in spite of being sexually exploited, resisted the idea of entering reformation programmes as they either felt too ashamed of their past or declined the idea of giving up their independent lifestyle for strictly disciplined life. Even though reform work failed in many cases, the social care for prostitutes did rescue many women. However, since the demand for sex trade was overseen by moral reformers who saw the woman as the cause, prostitution continued to be a widespread social problem in the Victorian period.

The social cure of the prostitute extended beyond reform with the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Act in 1864. The aim was to stifle the spread of venereal disease by submitting prostitutes to medical examinations and enforced treatment in Lock Hospitals. This act was based on the peculiar assumption that venereal disease was spread through sexual intercourse with diseased prostitutes and that existing voluntary remedies were ineffective (Walkowitz, *Prostitution* 48). In other words, woman alone was considered to be the source of venereal disease while her male client's implication in the spread of syphilis and gonorrhoea was discarded. Walkowitz remarks, "the Contagious Diseases Acts were consistent with a set of attitudes and 'habits of mind' toward women, sexuality, and class that permeated official Victorian culture" (*Prostitution* 70). In fact, this legislation targeted women alone as the source of venereal disease and placed male promiscuity in a blind spot. This legal measure would have severe effect on prostitutes and working-class women alike because, as Weeks highlights, women could be arrested for medical examination of venereal disease on

mere suspicion (20). In some cases it would have devastating effects as poor women might have been obliged to retort to selling their bodies when under difficult financial situations, and as established by now, prostitution was often a transitory state in a woman's life. Unfortunately, these women ran the risk of being socially stigmatised for the rest of their lives because of the methods applied in enforcing the act. In this sense, the Contagious Diseases Act was a clear example of gender discrimination and class prejudice. Women who had been submitted to examination, confined in Lock wards or arrested for resisting police orders, faced social ostracism for two reasons: first, because of disapproval of the trade, and second, for fear of being suspected by association and subsequently arrested.

The Contagious Diseases Act bears witness to how the identification of the prostitute as the root to social evil, sexual impurity and consequently the source of contamination threw legal procedures onto the axis of gender. In addition to this, it was a matter of class since, first and foremost, the majority of women that practised sex trade belonged to the impoverished layer of society, but also because any working-class women could be targeted as a fallen woman on mere suspicions grounded on gender and class. Unskilled and often illiterate women saw themselves obliged to sell their bodies for survival (Mayhew). Bartley remarks that Mayhew classified prostitutes according to the social status of their clients (3). As a matter of fact, it reveals that while the prostitute came from the working class, male customers constituted a wider spectrum of class. This pinpoints the prostituted woman's liminal position as a bridge between classes as she is in direct contact with members from all layers of society. Her liminal position was both social and locational as she had intercourse with people from different social layers and both marginalised and wealthy urban areas were the haunts of prostitutes.

While Mayhew fails to recognise male clients' role in the spreading of venereal diseases, the Contagious Diseases Act ignores the possibility completely, and as a consequence working-class women became the scapegoat for the wide dispersal of syphilis across the nation. All layers of societies severely affected as men from all classes went on illicit sprees. If married, they ran the risk of not only contracting the disease but of passing it onto his wife. Here, Walkowitz denounces how male doctors often were accomplices in introducing venereal diseases at the bosom of the family as they helped men to camouflage their symptoms (*Prostitution* 55).

A shift in attitudes towards prostitutes occurred during the Victorian period and the charity workers and institution redirected the focus from cure to prevention. Whereas early actions to rid society of prostitution concentrated on reforming and curing fallen women, in the mid- and late-Victorian period greater importance was given to prevention. The Contagious Diseases Act met strong opposition and a caused social outcry, which got both men and women politically involved in a campaign to repeal the act. Walkowitz draws attention to how women turned moral reform into a wider goal of women's emancipation as they entered the political arena for the first time (*Prostitution* 132-33). The Contagious Diseases Act was finally repealed in 1886 after a hard campaign with Josephine Butler at the forefront. Although charity workers turned their attention to preventing girls from falling into to trade, reform was still a matter of social concern and penitentiaries and reform institutions continued active.

The objective of the prevention associations was to impede that young girls strayed into a life of vice and immorality and to provide them with necessary basic knowledge to lead a decent and virtuous life. There were several preventive associations, but probably the most important one was the Ladies' Association for the

Care of Friendless Girls.[26] By late-Victorian era the association had developed into more than hundred affiliations across the country. In lines with reform organisations who inferred Christian values, the Ladies' Associations promoted chastity and purity as a preventive method against prostitution. Bartley points out that philanthropists "were encouraged to unite middle-class and working-class women in a Christian campaign against prostitution" (75). Notwithstanding, gender and class were still at heart as measures were taken for women while men remained in the blind spot. Some campaigners, as Josephine Butler and Ellice Hopkins, directed harsh criticism towards the prevailing misbeliefs that turned woman into the scapegoat of prostitution.

Bartley questions the supposed female unity and cross-class sisterhood that the Ladies' Associations proclaimed arguing that "it was a one-way power relationship whereby middle-class women exerted their own definition of what was considered to be correct forms of behaviour and attempted to appropriate the moral selves of the less respectable of the working class" (75-76). In the same lines, Walkowitz proposes that the middle-class involvement in prevention associations was hierarchical, controlling and punitive (*Prostitution* 131). Thus, the success of prevention was limited on the same terms as reform as both methods were circumscribed by class authority and gender prejudices. Young girls were given a Christian education and trained in trades available to their class as domestic service or labour to improve their possibilities to become financially self-sufficient and morally pure. The drawbacks were that they instigated middle-class values as the norm for members of a class where bourgeois ideology was not always functional. Moreover, this was highly contradictive as middle-class men continued to haunt the impoverished areas for illicit sprees, which reveals that

[26] For instance Picard mentions The Midnight Mission (1853) and The Female Mission to the Fallen (1858) (315-17). For a detailed description of different rescue societies that promoted reform see Barley's *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (2000). Among others the critic mentions the Metropolitan Association for the Befriendling of Young Servants, Girls' Guild of Good Life or the Girls' Friendly Society.

working-class women were expected to uphold values that emphasised virtue, chastity and morality, while their proper class was unable to sustain these beliefs themselves.

The prostitute embodied the Victorian double standards because at the same time as society condemned both the woman and the trade for immorality and vice, prostitution was more widely spread than ever and brothels were numerous. I have earlier referred to Marcus's claims that the Victorian habit to deal with prostitution was largely to ignore its existence (6). Nevertheless, as explained above, the Vagrancy Act and Contagious Diseases Act together with the middle-class endeavour of prevention and reform testify to how prostitution attracted much attention and social concern during the Victorian period. Nonetheless, the engagement in battle against prostitution also goes hand in hand with the fear of sexual and immoral contamination of diseased and promiscuous prostitutes on the families and homes respectable classes. Picard argues that the local police often turned a blind eye to sex trade and perceives the legal measures as vague and unclear regarding prostitution:

> [t]here was no clear law defining a prostitute. The local bobbies probably knew the women in their patch who were on the game, but they could only pull the in if they were making a nuisance of themselves. The same with brothels; it was an offence at Common Law to keep a brothel, but if the owner and the girls were discreet, many brothels probably stayed out of trouble. (310)

In other words, the legal system had loopholes and the police could choose to see between their fingers and allow for prostitutes and brothels to practise their trade as long as they did not interfere with public peace and order.

As seen above, the prostitute was a liminal figure in many ways. She transgressed spatial limits as she moved about the city and traversed class boundaries both socially and geographically. Much of the clientele of brothels came from the upper

and middle classes who went slumming for illicit sprees in the marginalised areas of the city as Whitechapel and St Giles. As Pollock argues, "slumming allowed the aristocracy [to] live dangerously, playing with sexual freedom their classed gender denied them" (78). Similarly, Koven addresses the slums as an illicit playground for West End mashers who ventured into the rookeries for sex, drugs and popular entertainment (14). Thus, the prostitute was a transitional figure in the sense that she dissolved class boundaries through sexual intercourse with members of other classes. Moreover, certain respectable areas were also frequent haunts of prostitutes as for example the West End and the Strand. Picard proposes three different places and three different levels of prostitution in London "the poor women in the slums, the more prosperous ones working the Stand and the Haymarket, and the *grandes horizontals* of the West End" (311). The critic classifies the prostitute according to the area she works rather than the type class pertinence of her costumer as Mayhew did in his taxonomy of fallen women. The variety of these social districts and class pertinence shows that the prostitute was a mobile figure who could transgress social limits and geographical borders in order to practise her trade. Although prostitutes were mainly from the working classes, they did not necessarily keep within working-class areas but instead they were metaphorically on the threshold of society.

In order to surmount the possible obstacles that limited their presence and mobility in the streets, these women adopted strategies to move freely. The tricks and techniques to ply their trade altered, as they had to adapt their strategy to the area they worked in. The prostitute was obliged to posit herself in the middle ground between readability and unreadability, sexual titillation and respectability in her search for clients in the well-off areas. As suggested above, women's movement in the public sphere was circumscribed by strict ideological norms and sexual mores that dictated

acceptable and unacceptable public behaviour. Drawing on Walkowitz's and Nead's argument that middle-class women had to adopt specific patterns of public manner that affected pace, movement and vision to avoid being mistaken for prostitutes, I suggest that this also testifies to how the prostitute relied on the same principles. The two main purposes were to pass unnoticed by authorities at the same time as she was a strong visual presence on the urban panorama.

The West End was an area frequented by both respectable ladies and perambulating prostitutes who had turned this as a haunt for clients among the genteel. Consequently, as Nead notices, this was an area where mistaken identities often occurred and sex harassment was common (66). Moreover, the scholar stresses how these women were caught up in a web of glances as their presence in the streets was circumscribed by voyeurism and promiscuity, and subsequently were recommended to "dress unattractively, walk at a steady pace and look straight ahead" (Nead 66), as to protect themselves from being accosted by men who mistake them for prostitutes. Walkowitz adds that respectable girls were instructed to avoid strolling at a leisured pace, to look straight ahead and specifically to move away from approaching men (*City* 51). If we place the prostitute in focus instead of middle-class wives and women, the strategies regarding pace, movement, apparel and looking also suggest that the prostitute used the very same strategies to pass as a respectable woman and avoid police harassment or arrest while signalling out her trade to possible clients using the very same measures. The prostitute is a mobilised observer of the streets and her social marginality sets her aside from the rest of the crowd. Moving as a peripheral urban stroller she walks around the urban panorama in a *flâneur*-like manner at a pace that signals her out her profession. This pinpoints her awareness of her own role as a

prostitute and how she makes meaning of this through walking and observing from the city from the margins.

The identification of the prostitute as a *flâneuse* has been problematised and rejected by many critics. Wolff was among the first scholars to extend the Baudelairean concept of the *flâneur* to women, but only to decline the idea that the women could derive pleasure from the city on the same terms as the *flâneur*, mainly because "women could not stroll alone in the city" and that respectable women in the 1850s would certainly not met the gaze of strange men walking in the streets ("Invisible" 41-42). As an answer, Wilson suggested that the prostitute could be considered as female counterpart of this male urban stroller asserting that the prostitute in the role of a streetwalker invites for an interpretation that reaches beyond feminist perspectives of victimisation or male romanticised views of the public woman as a bohemian figure (E Wilson, "Invisible" 91). However, many critics did not favour this idea, and indeed, the linkage between these urban strollers is questionable as the prostitute does certainly not enjoy the city on the same conditions as the *flâneur*. As a urban stroller she was stipulated as a woman of pleasure and the passive object of the male gaze rather than subject deriving pleasure from observing the streets. In a later text Wilson admits that, "[w]hen I suggested that nineteenth-century prostitutes might be considered as the *flâneuses* of their time I was being intentionally provocative, and one telling argument advanced against this view was that prostitutes are not strolling and observing but are *working*" (E Wilson, *The Contradictions of Culture* 91). In the beginning of this chapter I set out to locate a *flâneuse* and one of my main arguments was that the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse* should be approached in terms of space, movement, vision and subjectivity regardless of the male experience of the modern city. In these lines, I propose that the

prostitute in Victorian society shares some affinities with the *flâneur* and could be read as a representative urban figure who embodies a female vision of the city.

In this context, Pollock addresses female presence in the city highlighting presence and vision:

> The spaces of femininity are those from which femininity is lived as a positionality in discourse and social practice. They are the product of a lived sense of a social locatedness, mobility and visibility, in the social relations of seeing and being seen. Shaped within the sexual politics of looking as they demarcate a particular social organization of the gaze which itself works back to secure a particular social ordering of sexual difference. (66)

The critic gives much importance to the gendered division of separate spheres in the nineteenth century and she concurs with Woolf on the point that the *flâneur* had no female counterpart. The critic uses this to back her argument that "the flâneur [sic] is an exclusive masculine type which functions within the matrix of bourgeois ideology through which social spaces of the city were constructed by the overlying doctrine of separate spheres" (Pollock 67). Her argument is clearly biased towards one social stratum and I consider that it is a serious weakness in her claim that the *flâneur* could only be male. The prostitute stood outside this matrix of gendered division and respectability and therefore, I wish to emphasis the first quote by Pollock as she speaks about social space and femininity, mobility and visibility as well as the social relations of seeing and being seen because the critic is clearly making a point here.

As established by now, the prostitute was defined according to location and possessed both social and geographical mobility representing that way a metaphorical pathway between classes. Even though women did not access the streets with the same freedom as men, this also enfolds the requirement of spatial knowledge and insight into

the underlying power structures of patriarchal ideology. As a result, women moving within the public sphere were endowed with as consciousness that was specific to their gender. The consciousness of transgression, trespassing as well as the disputed sexuality and objectification of female body into commodity that Nord has pointed out ("The Urban Peripatetic" 366), pinpoints how women once aware familiar with the underlying power structures and norms that conditioned their presence in the streets adapted different strategies to venture out into the public sphere which unavoidably implied observation of the urban scene.

The prostitute is a peripheral urban figure in a threefold way: she is familiar with the eroticised underworld of Victorian society, socially ostracised because of her profession, and a liminal character who is able to transcend both geographical and social boundaries. Nord emphasises how the poor and the prostitute were cast in a positive perspective in the eyes of the flâneur who "sees [them] not as victims or objects of pity but as urban actors free from the constraints of bourgeois life" (*Walking* 43). Although the prostitute did not live under the gendered ideology of the bourgeoisie, her presence in the streets was certainly affected by it and the *flâneur*'s idealised image of the prostitute as a liberated person is highly romanticised. Nonetheless, she had freed herself from the gendered inhibitions placed on her sex according to ideology of the upper social stratum of society.

Urban strolling is deeply invested with vision and subjectivity as they are inflected by personal interpretation and experience of space that circumscribes the walking subject's sense of belonging. One feminist geographer denotes how spatial, temporal and social dimensions interlock in the production of social space (Koskela 261), and these are crucial factors that condition the prostitute's presence in the streets. The semiotics of space denotes how these dimensions are read, produced and lived. The

Victorian prostitute possessed a specialist spatial knowledge that can be seen in the transitory dynamics her activities and haunts. Spaces of prostitution shift locations according to the hours of the day and night, and in Victorian London certain areas were connected to prostitution depending on the time of the day.[27]

The fleeting nature of the prostitute and her spatial belonging to the public sphere are tied up in daily routines of walking and observing the streets. Nord draws a parallel between the encounter of the *flâneur* and the crowd in the modern city with the relationship between the prostitute and her client stressing the transitory and anonymous nature that connotes their social practices (*Walking* 43). As a mobilised observer of the urban panorama the prostitute exerts agency and gains spatial knowledge as she reads the crowd, maps out her territory and turns these into practice by engaging in acts of soliciting. One feminist geographer contends that daily and ritualised practices of walking have a clear gendered dimension that generally excludes women from power and influence (Fenster 245). Similarly, a different scholar stresses how "[p]ower relationships intertwine in the field of vision including acts of seeing and being seen, as well as cultural meanings of the visual and its representations" (Koskela 258). In this regard, specific spaces and walking practices are also gendered. Thus, Nord's account of the prostitute as a woman who stood apart from bourgeois social constraints, I suggest that her possibility to move with freedom in the streets did require a broad spatial and cultural knowledge as her movement pattern had to adapt to the class norms of the area she was practising her trade. Urban walking was a daily routine for prostitutes who followed a ritualised pattern and her movements across urban spaces testify to how she reads and interprets the city and the crowd and turns it into an arena of social enactments, which subsequently represents a stance of subjectivity.

[27] For a detailed description of the shifting areas of soliciting according to the hours of the day and night see Picard's chapter on women in *Victorian London: The Life of a City* (2005).

As the prostitute moves around the city she engages in a visual negotiation regarding her identity. In doing so, she is clearly circumscribed by sexual desire and objectification. Buck-Morss argues that for Baudelaire the prostitute was "the embodiment of objectivity, not subjectivity", and moreover, she represented, in the poet's own words: "a commodity and seller in one" (Baudelarie qtd. in Buck-Morss 120). Similarly, Wilson equates the prostitute to a metaphor of the new urban regime of the nineteenth century arguing that "prostitution symbolises commodisation, mass production and the rise of the masses" (E Wilson, *The Contradictions of Culture* 85). This is true and I do not wish to discard the male objectifying gaze, conversely, I wish to add another perspective that recognises the prostitute as an active agent in the visual encounter between her and men who solicit her services. Nead emphasises how semantic play on relational looking is recalled in nineteenth-century attempts to codify public respectability in the streets (73). While respectable women were encouraged not to meet the gaze of strange men and certainly not engage in conversation with unknown men, the prostitute relied on the interchange of glances and visual negotiation of her identity.

Women within the world of spectacle similarly relied on the audience's gaze and in the next section I will focus on different entertainment spaces to discover how the spectacle of the female body was both a titillating show and a chance for women to challenge gender codes through acts of performance. In this vein I will probe the assumption that female performers were socially stigmatised for their connection with prostitutes and for offering pleasure in exchange for money. I will shed light on the way professional female performers manage to circumvent the public/private ideology and contextualise their identities within performative spaces in the public sphere.

3.2. The Stage: The Music-Hall Actress, the Circus Artist and the Freak Performer

The scope of this section is to give an overview of the Victorian world of spectacle and examine female performers in the light of agency and subjectivity in regard to different performative spaces. In the previous section I have approached the prostitute and the philanthropist as urban strollers who achieved a sense of independence and freedom as they gained access to the streets and exerted agency. I will expand these ideas to female professional performers who took to the stage in search for an identity outside the patriarchal framework. Victorian popular entertainment has been given scant attention in the past, yet the present critical void is increasingly paying attention to spaces that are linked to nineteenth-century popular culture as the music hall, the circus and the freak show; nonetheless, critics consider them separately. My aim is to take a closer look at female artists in the aforementioned performance genres in an attempt to prove how Victorian popular entertainment and working-class spaces of leisure provided a public space for women where they could pursue a professional career and subsequently gain independence and exert agency in the public sphere. My principal argument is that women acquired voice and presence in the public realm as professional artists on the stage. In spite of belonging to popular culture, the music hall, the circus and the freak show have historically been recorded through the lens of the bourgeoisie and traditionally and consequently been approached from a middle-class point of view by most scholars. In these lines, I will argue that there exists a substantial gap of female performers within the Victorian world of spectacle that are considered in the context of space and gender.

I will approach the Victorian world of spectacle utilising Lefebvre's notion of triadic space in order to take a closer look on how performative spaces provide a social space that contributes to the perception and conception of female performers, and

discover how the lived experience by professional women interlock with space, gender and subjectivity. I will focus on the specific dynamics between the audience and performer and consider how this reflects the mindset of the times by paying special attention to two modes of vision: the gaze and the stare depending on the context. My purpose is to shed light on how the Victorian world of spectacle represented a liminal space and offered women the possibility to subvert social norms and possibility to transgress fixed gender roles and appropriate a place within the public sphere.

Nineteenth-century popular theatre belongs to a period in theatre history that Michael Booth refers to as "the dark abyss" (2). Three decades later Jane Moody urges for an interdisciplinary study of nineteenth-century popular theatre claiming that it is "a subject crying out for new theoretical perspectives and a greater self-consciousness about the process of historical enquiry" (112). The critic contends that theatre historians have limited their research to simply echoing conventions stated by previous scholars who focused on the biographies of star performers and history of theatre buildings (Moody 117). Booth's coinage points at how popular forms of entertainment for long were neglected by scholars and new findings are still today waiting to emerge. Although some early attempts on new approaches to Victorian popular theatre, as for instance Michael Barker's *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* (1978), at the end of the twentieth century there was still "a need to explore how spectatorship and production appropriated and contested languages of class at specific historical moments . . . [and] rather interpret [popular] forms of entertainment as emerging sites of modernity" (Moody 125). In other words, this invites for new approaches to the illegitimate state that ought to pay heed to popular performative spaces as sites of cultural exchange and social commentary.

Recently, criticism that undertakes examinations of Victorian popular culture has drawn attention to socio-cultural mass phenomenon as popular theatre in order to understand the nineteenth century holistically (Monrós, *Cassandra* 15-16). Clearly, popular culture is gaining interest of scholarly circles as it offers an insight into other viewpoints than those held by official history. Monrós validates the popular stage as an expression of contemporary ideological climate arguing, "the Victorian imagination incorporated sociological stereotypes into its visual and verbal culture which arose from changes in the economy and the mindset of the time" (*Cassandra* 157). In many ways, the music hall became a cultural site where middle-class values were subverted and moral norms clashed with the working-class mores.

As stated earlier, social historian Martha Vicinus paved the way for other critics to follow in considering the public realm as a site open for female experience in the Victorian period in the volume *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977). This work was one of the earliest attempts to validate the acting profession as an occupation that offered women freedom and independence in the Victorian period. Vicinus argues "while feminists in the second half of the century were struggling to expand the horizons of women, actresses were gaining entrée into reputable circles and a form of social equality they had never experienced before" ("New Trends" xix). Here, Christopher Kent's examination of the respectability of the Victorian actress provided an innovative approach to the changing status of the actress's reputation by switching the focus from social ostracism to an increasing recognition of the profession and a public site of agency. Since the 1990s onwards, the Victorian identification of female performers with prostitutes has been subject of academic inquiry and contemporary scholars pay heed to the actress as a public figure who gained independence and freedom (T C Davis 191), respectability (T C Davis 191; Monrós,

"Responsive Voices" 208) and a voice in the public sphere (Faulk 2004). What is central to this debate, though, is that there was a stark contrast between the legitimate theatre and the popular stage. I will concentrate on the latter arguing that bourgeois codes of respectability were not applicable to popular leisure spaces as the music-hall, and as a result, these sites of performance provided an alternative space for women to negotiate their presence and agency in the public realm.

3.2.1. The Music-Hall Actress

In the volume *Actresses as Working Women* (1991) Tracy C Davis carries out a close examination of the social identity of female performers in Victorian culture studying both the profession and its conditions. She acknowledges that the similarities that established a link between the prostitute and the actress determined her social status in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, simultaneously she calls out attention to the exorbitant generalisation of such parallelism claiming, "the popular association between actresses and prostitutes is patently insufficient" (T C Davis 100). This overgeneralisation is due to several common characteristics of the two professions—above all for being public and professional women who offer pleasure in exchange for money, but also because both involve physical exhibition to some degree. Consequently, the acting profession was not considered as a respectable role for women. From a bourgeois point of view, women were not expected to take an active participation in non-domestic activities or frequent social places that were considered immoral, vulgar, vicious and criminal. Still, the question whether the Victorian actress was socially on equal terms as the prostitute remains unanswered. For this reason, an examination of nineteenth-century popular culture may shed light over this uncertainty,

because it mirrors the mindset of the time. Moreover, if we take a closer look at the music-hall actress there is ample evidence of how women working within performative spaces took advantage of the stage to transcend gendered boundaries and cultural restraints, which meant a destabilisation of the public/private dichotomy.

Parting from this idea, I will firstly give a brief description of the evolution of the music hall from its beginning as a working-class leisure form towards becoming a middle-class show business. My aim here is to set a basis for my argument that bourgeois values were imposed on a working-class culture. Still, middle-class normativity did not reach all layers of society and, in this sense, the extension those ideals on popular culture was limited. Secondly, I will take a look at the audience and signal out the female presence among the visitors. This defies the general assumption that all women in the audience were prostitutes. Next, I will identify the special features of this popular entertainment form to finally narrow down my study to the music-hall actress and question her connection to fallen women.

We generally think about Victorian women in their different roles within the doctrine of domesticity. Whether we consider them in terms of submissive housewives and mothers who adapted to the cult of true womanhood or as rebellious New Women who struggled for more rights, we tend to envision these women within a middle-class frame of mind. The obvious drawback of applying this perspective is that it gives us the erroneous idea that all women were categorised according to bourgeois social mores. Therefore, I propose that the middle-class disregard for actresses has eclipsed working-class regard for female professional performers. In order to get a holistic picture of the disrespectability that supposedly tainted the actress, I encourage scholars to have a closer look at this female professional including an alternative angle, namely, the working-class point of view.

The nineteenth-century actress ran the risk of being labelled with the same social stigma as the prostitutes. Although they may have shared the common ground of being public women that offered pleasure, these professionals were perceived as immoral because as public women they defied the domestic doctrine. The music-hall actress occupied a special place in society as a professional performer on the popular stage since it developed within an inherently patriarchal society as the Victorian. Davis notices that the fact that the actress held a public position destabilised the identification of women to the home:

> the actress's contravention of men's rules for feminine behaviour likened her to prostitutes not only in terms of her public profile, but also in her perceived anti-domestic choice. She was criticised for doing exactly what men did: turning outside the home for social intercourse, intellectual stimulation, and occupational fulfilment. (T C Davis 86)

In this sense, the actress posed a threat to the patriarchal order, which subsequently might have triggered the categorisation of the acting profession as a disrespectable occupation. Nevertheless, the concern of morality as stipulated by the doctrine of domesticity was apparently linked to the well-off classes. As Jeffrey Weeks notices, the labouring classes had different sexual mores than the genteel and pre-marital sex was indulgently overseen among the working classes (59-60). Therefore, I pose the question whether middle-class respectability was applicable to a working-class culture such as the music hall, and more concretely to the actress as bourgeois mores are imbedded in the cult of domesticity.

Peter Bailey was among the first to acknowledge music-hall culture as a subject matter that offers insight into the lived experience of the working classes and a vital force in the formation of a distinct class identity (2). In his monograph *Popular Culture*

and Performance in the Victorian City (1998) he validates the music hall as a space for new populist ideology that allowed for the audience to negotiate the unsettling encounters of urban life. Bailey stresses how popular culture offers contemporary scholars the possibility to view society from the perspective of the working classes arguing that "[m]usic-hall was both more and less than a class mode of expression and has yet to be fully understood in terms of its participants' measure of significance and what its meaning was for them" (130). Accordingly, as an entertainment form that mirrored working-class values its performances, audiences and actors should be interpreted outside a middle-class framework.

Although the origins of the music hall is not clear, it is for certain that it originated as a working-class culture, which John Golby and Bill Purdue refer to as the "great late nineteenth-century vehicle for working-class expression and enjoyment" (24).[28] The Victorian music hall era can be subdivided into three periods; the early music hall of the 1830s and 40s, the mid-period between the 1850 to the 70s, and the late-era from the 1880s to early twentieth century. It became an institutionalised entertainment business in the 1850s when the first halls were built for this purpose only, Charles Morton's Canterbury Hall being the first one in 1852.[29] By the 1860s it took on the full apparatus of commercialised production and from the 1880s onwards, big proprietors were laying claim to a greater social and aesthetic respectability (Bailey 140). Before that, music-hall culture had existed as a peripheral entertainment in public houses where the working classes spent their leisure time. From being a complimentary and free entertainment performed by amateurs at pubs and song-and-supper rooms it

[28] According to Bernard Waites, the song-and-supper rooms, travelling theatre companies and the complimentary entertainment provided at the public houses are three possible origins (48-49).

[29] Charles Morton (1819-1904) is commonly acknowledged as the father of the English music hall after opening the Canterbury Hall in Lambeth (London). For a detailed description of the evolution of the music hall in London see Peter Bailey's *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (1998). For illustration of the spatial arrangement of the halls see plates 1 and 2 in appendix.

developed into a separate institution with professional actors as the century evolved. Thus, the mid-Victorian music hall is of special interest as it marks a transition from being an exclusively working-class popular culture to attracting other classes.

In the 1860s the music hall had obtained an immense popularity and as it grew in popularity it became more commercialised, and as a consequence the middle-class involvement in this entertainment business extended. Attridge details how the Victorian music hall was both a working-class culture "from below" and a "commercialized mass culture from above" (17). In many ways this originally bottom-to-top culture transformed into a top-to-bottom organisation that attempted to control possible agnostic class interests (Attridge 19). For instance, professionals from non-working-class background became responsible for composing music-hall songs, and in this sense the lyrics corresponded to middle-class values more than working-class frame of mind. Bailey denounces how this led to an "*embourgeoisement*" of the songs as the lyrics were "drained of any radical or oppositional content" (130). As a result, the ideals and social norms of the upper classes were imposed on the working classes. Nevertheless, as Dagmar Kift argues, "as part of working-class culture it was inevitable bound up with conflicts involving working-class people" (7). Accordingly, I wish to stress that the music hall started as a working-class culture for and by the people and in spite of the entrance of the bourgeoisie into this specifically proletarian sphere, the working class remained the main audience. In this sense, the music-hall turned into a cross-class culture where people from different social strata gathered, although they remained socially differentiated in the audience by the admission prices (Kift 62).

Women were scarce in the halls during the early music-hall period, both on and off the stage. At first, the music-hall audience was exclusively male, with a special day for women called Ladies' Night. Yet, the conditions of the halls in London and in the

industrial areas differed. Kift notices that "the proportions of women in the audience was particularly high in those cities which offered paid work for women" (64). In addition, she claims that one of the reasons behind middle-classes disapproval of this leisure institution was because it was aimed at all members of the working-class family (Kift 73). The bourgeoisie considered the music hall as a breeding ground of vice and immorality and an improper place for women and children. When Morton opened Canterbury Hall in London he also decided to admit women to any programme and publicly claimed that "'No ladies admitted' has been the chivalrous phrase in which Englishmen of the nineteenth century exclude the gentler sex from rational and refining recreations" (Morton qtd. in Waites 50). Morton was eager to secure the respectability of his entertainment business and by allowing women into the halls he aimed to demonstrate its legitimacy and subsequently dissociate the institution from vulgarity and immorality. Nevertheless, the impact would turn out different as once women were granted entrance to the halls they gained access to a public social space of mixed class and gender.

The fact that the music halls were a common soliciting ground for prostitutes has problematised women's presence in the halls both on and off the stage as it foregrounded an association with women in the trade. What is more, the actress in particular was considered affiliated to prostitution in the Victorian period. Moody poses the question "why where actresses so equivocal in Victorian society?" (117). Davis points out that working-class women did visit the halls for enjoyment and the parallelism between prostitution and women in the halls is an overgeneralisation which is indebted to middle-class reforms and moralists:

> [t]heatrical impropriety was symptomatic of a complex network of Victorian attitudes and practices. The consequence for actresses was a social identity

> saturated with moral equivocacy. The work, not the individual, made this inevitability. This marked their social identity in the culture. (T C Davis163)

I do not deny the existence of sex trade and illicit encounters in the halls, and the fact that both prostitutes and actresses earned money by offering pleasure for money attributed them with the same social stigma. In addition, this generalisation had to do with the fact that these female professionals worked within the same leisure space. Still, if respectability was tied to bourgeois normativity I pose the question whether it was applicable to working-class culture, and concretely their perception of the social status of the actress.

I have earlier mentioned that members of the labouring classses had their proper set of sexual values and their views on sexual behaviour and relationship did not coincide with the middle-class norms. Davis argues that "[a]spirants from the labouring classes had a different perspective on the merits and demerits of an acting career. They were less discouraged by perceptions of the theatre as morally equivocal and actresses as un-womanly" (T C Davis 76). Therefore, it is important to consider the way female performers enacted active roles on stage, and in doing so, encountered a public space where they could exert agency and articulate their voices. As a result, a career on the music-hall stage provided a unique opportunity for women to participate in the public realm and it was also one of the few professional options for women.

The leisure areas of the impoverished parts of the city attracted members from all classes and the music hall turned into a cross-class social space. Moreover, the repertoire, which at first was mainly male, was altered as the female audience grew and this led to an increase of female artists on the stage. The Victorian middle-class view on popular entertainment was ambiguous. At the same time as the bourgeoisie saw popular culture as vulgar, immoral and low, the music halls attracted audience and investors

from the middle classes. Their negative view on popular entertainment was linked to the kind of spectacle that was offered on the stage, and as Faulk notes, the disgust for the staging of female body as a spectacle was "class-bound in codes of taste and disgust" (146).

Several critics challenge the general association between women in the halls and prostitutes (Walkowitz, *City* 50; Kift 64; Nead 180). Walkowitz, for instance, has drawn attention to how all female visitors were not involved in sex trade pointing at the fact that respectable family parties including men with their wives or girlfriends visited the halls (*City* 45). I suggest that the image of the halls as a breeding ground for vice is therefore linked to social class. In a study of the music-hall audience Kift notices that, on the one hand, several working-class women went to the halls in search for entertainment and leisure, and on the other, the scholar recognises that the presence of prostitutes in the halls is undeniable (64). As developed before, it is important though to bear in mind that pre-marital sex was accepted among the labouring classes and long-life effective relationships without legal binding were common. Therefore, women mingling with men in the audience might have caused a wrongful impression on those middle-class ladies that were accustomed to the cult of domesticity when they visited the halls. This would moreover have the effect of giving misleading numbers of prostitutes in the halls. Consequently, immoral and criminal association turned the social practices within leisure spaces into a threat against bourgeois respectability and tainted the status of popular culture with pejorative connotations. This caused great worries among the Victorian middle class, which embraced prudery and reinforced strict moral and rigid social codes as a means of identification with the upper classes and dissociation from the labouring masses.

The world of spectacle provided several spaces of entertainment where women could defy their assigned gender roles. Taken this, I suggest that women appropriated a female space outside the domestic sphere by visiting shows, exhibitions and leisure spaces, as well as negotiate gender identities on stage. Accordingly, Walkowitz claims that the presence of women in the music halls changed the atmosphere in the halls, and challenged the exclusion of women in the public spheres (*City* 45). Agreeing with Walkowitz, I consider that women's presence in the halls broke with the public/private dichotomy in a double sense. First, the fact that working-class female spectators went to the halls for amusement challenged the idea that lower-class women in the audience were prostitutes. Second, the participation of women on stage as part of a public spectacle culture, not only situated them in the public sphere, but also provided a space where to challenge patriarchy and gendered restrictions.

Prostitution did occur in the halls and the upper- and middle-class flirtations with the female performers backstage instigated their low reputation. Bernard Waites unveils that managers and waiters were even involved in procuring and stresses how special private rooms were set up for wealthy visitors who were granted entry to the artistes' canteen where they positioned chorus girls (52). The police basically ignored its existence as this practice was perceived neither as a social threat nor a cause of disorder (Waites 52). Yet, there is no evidence that proves that actresses were directly involved in prostitution. On the contrary, the equation of the actress to the prostitute was a class issue. Davis presents evidence that reveals how "identifications of the lower theatrical ranks of prostitutes were erroneous" (T C Davis 78). The critic contends that although the two professions were close both "in fact and fancy . . . [,] open prostitution for any type of female performer was out of the question, as theatrical and prostitution district were one and the same and recognition by a manager meant instant dismissal

without recommendation" (T C Davis 78). Likewise, she stresses that while many prostitutes claimed to be actresses when approached by the police, no stage involvement is recorded in prison sentences that involve prostitutes (80). Nonetheless, this strategy attributed the word actress with a euphemistic meaning that has incised a parallelism between the professions. Hence, the possibility remains that these women received them as admirers. Likely, the chance that genteel admirers seduced young actresses was great. Notwithstanding, as Monrós suggests, "the licentious surrounding of the green rooms and voyeuristic attitudes of the male audiences" circumscribed the actress's reputation ("Responsive Voices" 208). Weeks stresses that the concept of morality for working-class girls differed from middle-class ladies' view on chastity (61). Therefore, since pre-marital sex is not equal to procuring, this singles out that the association between the actress and the prostitute was culturally framed by a specific class perception.

Although the middle class gained terrain within the management and organisation of the halls and subsequently influence, we ought not to underestimate the importance of the performer and his or her interpretations of manuscript and lyrics. Taking into consideration the multiple spectacle available, I wish to point out three notable characteristics of the music-hall stage: knowingness, direct address and appearing in character. Bailey, who coined the expression "knowingness", recognises it as the major distinctive element of the nineteenth-century music-hall culture (128). Knowingness could be defined as an interlanguage, which enabled the audience to decode the music-hall songs and take an active part in the performance displayed on stage. Attridge explains this phenomenon as follows:

> [k]nowingness, both drawn upon and created in the performance, facilitates a domain of *shared knowledge* and secrets about life, custom and behaviour. This tends itself to a comic pragmatism – the ironic use of official idioms and

> language, to nudge-a-wink humour, as well as to more overtly serious forms of shared knowledge. Knowingness activates an audience from being passive consumers to co-producers. (24; emphasis added)

Hence, music-hall performance relied on the interaction between actor and spectator, which enabled them to decode the covert meanings of the lyrics.

Similarly, Moody emphasises the importance of the active spectatorship in halls by drawing attention to the audience's involvement and participation in the spectacle (123). In contrast to the audience of 'serious' theatre where spectators are expected to remain as receptors of the theatrical act, the music-hall audience was anything but passive and direct address was an integrate part of the performance. Conversely, the audience participated actively in the spectacle on stage following along in the chorus of the songs; and more importantly, it was a common practice to start a dialogue with the artist on stage. The performers drew eloquently on double entendre and the audience's knowingness by making incomplete deliveries in speech or leaving gaps for the auditorium to fill in (Bailey 142). As Moody notes, this specific practice was shaped by, as well as shaping, the discourse of the streets (121), and to a large extent the songs and dialogues imitated street style of manner and speech (Bailey 132).

The third fundamental, and visually recognisable, characteristic of music-hall performance was the stage device of appearing in persona. The artists would enter the stage impersonating the main character of the lyrics they sang. This way, the performer had the possibility of presenting and reflecting over gender roles to later create alternative images of social selves (Kift 45). Form time to time the artist would make asides to the audience commenting on the very same character he or she was impersonating. In this sense, the performer had the possibility to poke fun at or even criticise stereotyped figures often created by bourgeoisie songwriters. Kift contends that

through characterisation, the actors and actresses made mockery of the middle-class' ideas of Victorian values and presented their own alternatives in opposition to what was regarded as socially acceptable behaviour (2). In the early music hall cultural figures like the chimney sweeper and the sailor were common and it was until later that middle-class figures like the swell, or the Lion Comique, were introduced on the stage and in the 1860s he became the main draw of the halls. This music-hall character was a glamourised working-class dandy who was fond of drinking, women and entertainment and saw life from the brighter side. He was a typical lordly and elegant character that centred on themes such as women and drinking and avoided topics such as work or money (Bailey 101). Nicholas Daly values the instructive quality of their performances claiming that:

> [in] their songs as well as their star personas, the lions and serio-comic female vocalists offered the working as well as the lower-middle classes lessons in how to take part in consumer society, how to be streetwise, and how to be a modern man or woman of the world. (164-65)

As the above survey has attempted to show, the music hall as a social space of leisure with distinct characteristics such as knowingness, direct address and appearing in character provided a public space available for women. I have suggested that the common association between women in the halls, the actress in particular, and prostitute is an overgeneralisation and testifies to how popular entertainment spaces were gradually opening up for female participation both on and off the stage. In this context, Vicinus's discussion of the acting profession as a site of a new subjective experience of for women in the public realm are still relevant nearly forty years after their publication. Women could indeed enter new public space and experience feelings of independence and agency they were previously unacquainted with.

With the entrance of women into the halls, both on and off the stage, the underlying power structures of this public space were altered as women claimed their presence in the audience and articulated agency on stage. Davis's monograph *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991) represents a new approach to the Victorian actress as she defies the taken-for-granted idea that the Victorians saw the actress as prostitute stating, "the problematic behind drawing a parallel between actresses and prostitutes lies in the fact that neither group was a straightforward issue of class and gender. They did not represent a single class of women who uniformly broke specific cultural taboos" (77).

Similarly, Kerry Powell focuses on the actress as an independent woman in *Women and Victorian Theatre* (1997) by arguing that nineteenth-century theatre fortified repressive gender codes simultaneously as it provided a unique space and opportunity to experience a sense of power and independence (xi). She identifies these as the main reasons behind women's pursuit of a career within the acting profession and argues that female empowerment on stage provoked male anxiety (5). By taking a closer look at the music-hall actress, I will consider how the music hall provided a social space where women could appropriate a female space in the public realm. My main argument is that by applying the specific theatrical strategies of music-hall culture – knowingness, appearing in persona and interaction between audience and performer – they subvert imposed gender roles and invert social order. In addition, the concern of respectability and ideal of domesticity seemed to be a class distinction. Therefore, I pose the question whether it was applicable to a working-class culture such as the music hall. As explained above, the music hall originated as a working-class culture and albeit middle-class involvement, it remained a dominantly popular culture.

Powell draws attention to the abundance of "novels of theatre" at the period stressing that nearly all novels depict heroines that take to the stage in search for independence, not fame, and claims that a central theme is the male anxiety about empowered women (5-9). Barry J Faulk describes alike how "music-hall fictions" mainly portrays the acting profession as a possibility for women to assume new and powerful roles, and details how "by the 1880s and 1890s, the music hall had become a public space that was no longer subjected exclusively to a strict male control or dominance" (112). This marks a transition of gender-specific power dynamics in halls towards becoming a widening public sphere for women. The actress even found her way into the Victorian novel represented by Gwendolyn Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) or Miriam Roth in Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* (1890).

Women found a way to exert agency in public when performing on stage and through song they gained a voice. Faulk remarks that the music-hall stage became an important scenario where women had the possibility to enjoy a subject position in regard to culture and assume control outside the patriarchal institutions. Subsequently, he argues, female music-hall artists were able to challenge male stereotypes through song (111-12). Similarly, Waites notes that women were able to express their concerns in public, which was often done through popular songs depicting women's experience of courtship and marriage or by describing husband-and-wife relationships in a comic vein (60). For example, the actress Vesta Victoria (1873-1951) became famous all over England for her songs that comically bewailed her misfortunes in marriage. Although most of these songs seemed to comply with women's married dependency, they did comment on their situation by adding a wry humour to themes such as alcoholism, financial problems and pregnancy (Waites 62-63). This way, the music-hall stage

became a site women could contest culturally inscribed roles and make their own meaning of their place in society.

The culture-specific knowingness of the halls often served to undermine the established social conventions of respectability and in case of women, gendered limitations and inequalities. Female vocalist were able to ridicule and subvert bourgeois codes of femininity in their interpretations of the songs—which Jacqueline Bratton suggests to have served as a mirror for the female working-class audience who neither identified with nor conformed to middle-class ideals of femininity and domesticity (qtd. in Kift 47). Vicinus argues alike that the theatre constituted one of the few spaces where women were actively involved in the creation of a persona rather than "[to] wait passively to be acted on" ("New Trends" xix). In this sense the music hall stage offered a space for negotiating gendered restrictions and transgress limitations. Moreover, it defies the feminine ideal of domesticated and docile women. This can be seen in two popular music-hall personas that offered a titillating, yet, simultaneously a subversive spectacle: the naughty girl and the lioness comique—the female counterpart of the lion comique, also known as the swell character.

Appearing in character, as mentioned earlier, was one of the distinctive features of the music hall and the Naughty Girl persona was typically dressed as a naïve schoolgirl with pinafore and laces. Marie Lloyd (1870-192), who became a legendary actress, was widely famous for her saucy winks and gestures. Kift highlights that the actress was capable of revealing covert messages of the lyrics by simply raising an eyebrow, swing her hips or even wiggle a finger (47). Marie Lloyd's popularity was prompted by "her ability to represent and clarify complex identity as a working-class woman" (Faulk 46). Thus, her performance relied on the intrinsic knowingness and the audience skill in decoding her gestures and intonation during the musical acts. Songs

like "So Shy" or "Every Little Movement" inferred the Ruskinian imagery of women as lilies, as well as juxtaposing the Madonna with the Magdalene, and in doing so the lyrics conveyed middle-class conventions of womanhood. Yet, these could easily be reversed by the actress as she managed theatrical strategies as knowingness, double entendre and comic representations of character. In this case, Marie Lloyd exaggerated her body language at specific moments and broke off with her stage persona from time to time to make comments on the characters. Kift argues that

> [t]he particular attraction of the naughty girl lay in the fact that it blurred the lines of demarcation. To which it might be added that many women in the audience also rejected such lines of demarcation in their lives and the attractive alternatives offered in the halls only served to confirm their views and strengthen their self-confidence. (47)

Therefore, I would like to point out how female performers' enactments did not merely present a titillating spectacle for the male audience. On stage, the actress could transmit her view on ascribed gender roles and question their validity. Through laughter they denounced the artificiality of middle-class images of femininity by reversing socially inscribed roles in public. Accordingly, female performers also appealed to women in the audience as they represented an alternative model of femininity.

The exposure of the artificiality of gender roles through performative acts reached its peak in cross-dressing. Although this was a popular element in the halls both for male and female performers, especially in pantomimes, for the actress it played a specific role. As Davis points out "instead of losing her identity in such characters, the actress's gender was highlighted" (T C Davis 114). Hence, breeches roles revealed gender differences and also exposed them as artificial and performative. Likewise, Bailey claims that "the swell song exploited tensions generated by the ambiguities and

oppositions of class, status, gender and generation . . . the opposition lay not just between the performer and his or her target group but between sections in the audience" (121). Male impersonators such as the actresses Nellie Power (1854-87) and Vesta Tilley (1864-1952) gained fame and fortune in their caricatures of swell characters and for mimicking and parodying male Lion Comiques as Champagne Charlie. Actresses in breeches roles offered a double reading of gender as both a constructed category and for male and female roles as socially imposed, and consequently subject for reversal.

Knowingness was the hallmark of music-hall entertainment and several critics estimate how sexual allusion played a major role. Bailey argues that the pervasive motif of sexuality in the running subtext of the songs was possible due to the performer's and the audience's "capacity to operate at the very interface of the Victorian double standard" (144-45). The lion comique, in particular, was a highly erotised character that was depicted as a womaniser with a narcissistic sexuality. When male impersonators enacted male desire on stage they reversed gender roles and subverted heterosexual desire. Powell notes that their complex and contradictory characters "called attention to their femininity and transcribed their sexuality into the realm of male desire" (27).

As argued above, music-hall actresses disrupted the popularised image of docile wives tied to the home, which in turn represents a challenge of the public/private dichotomy since the actress as a professional woman moved within the public sphere. Yet, what is more, the stage served as a site of contestation of middle-class restrictions. I wish to stress how several critics have remarked that bourgeois views on sexual behaviour did not coincide with the working-class set of norms. Weeks, for example, highlights how this was a result of the specific living conditions of the working-class homes, where the lack of privacy within the domestic sphere was a major determinant of mores (66). In other words, domestic privacy was nearly impossible in the labouring-

class areas where family members were crammed together in small dwellings. Although this is not the focus here, I wish to highlight that this testifies to how dysfunctional the public/private dichotomy was for working-class people. Consequently, their view on sexual behaviour was also different. I have earlier mentioned that members of the working class indulgently oversaw extra-marital sex. In other words, whereas the respectable classes met female sexuality with hostility, especially when displayed in public places like the music hall, this did not cause the same reaction among the entire music-hall audience.

The acting profession increased in popularity in the late-Victorian era, and due to the professional limits for women to become an actress was one of the few ways to gain economic independence that did not involve service to others, either in factories or in domestic servitude. One critic notices that it "was an area of special dispensation from normal categories, moral and social, that defined woman's place" (Kent 94). In many aspects the actress was a liminal figure who was both freed from domestic restraints but limited by social norms. In spite of being a public and independent woman, the actress was not completely free from particular arrangements and codes that regulated her social status. Marriage was one of the strategies to protect the actress's reputation. Yet, if married outside the theatre, the actress was expected to leave the stage, whereas, in married to a man who was involved in the theatrical business she would continue acting. That way, some female performers used the title Mrs to acquire married status and, in doing so, get rid of the social stigma of a public women. Marriage caused a backlash against personal fulfilment of the actress outside the domestic sphere. As Powell states, while invoking marital status to ensure respectability, "the idea of marriage neutralized her power and independence . . . as they were expected to subjugate themselves to a man" (18). At the same time as gender categories could be

modified within the world of theatre, the acting profession for women was still circumscribed by a strict moral discourse and because of this the actress's social status has often been overtly discriminated.

Nevertheless, as Davis suggests, the actress did not consist in a homogenous group, and certain facts turn over the idea that female performers relied on a marriage status to assure respectability. For example, in the United States the use of the title Mrs guaranteed a marital status, which would preserve reputation and respectability. Conversely, in England "the married actress often continued to be billed as 'Miss_____' because there was felt to be a greater drawing power in the appearance of 'availability' in the actress" (Kent 105). Monrós notices that the famous burlesque actress Lydia Thompson after marriage was still billed with her maiden name and first announced as Mrs. Henderson when she went touring in America (*Cassandra* 175). Although the promotion of the actress as a single woman in England was a market strategy to enhance her availability, it also reveals that in England marriage and a life on stage were incompatible. However, we ought not avert the idea that women who enjoyed the independent life the stage offered them used this as a strategy to remain within the public realm. Most music-hall actresses were greatly admired by audiences from different classes, both by their peers and by members of superior social groups. Davis emphasises how

> society's ideology about women and prescription of female sexuality were constantly defied by the actress whose independence, education, allure and flouting sexual mores (unavoidable conditions of the work) gave her access to the male ruling elite while preventing her form being accepted by right-thinking and especially feminine society. (T C Davis 69-70)

In addition, the music-hall actress was likely to be respected by the members of her own class especially due to the fact that the popular audience held different values of sexual conduct. At the end of the nineteenth-century many young women from all classes of society were seeking to accomplish a stage career. The acting profession was attaining an improved social status and the increasing number of women working as actresses testifies to this.

3.2.2. The Circus Artist

Circus enactments can be traced back to the eighteenth century when they formed part of the culture of spectacle that surrounded fairgrounds and market places. Brenda Assael argues that the circus originates in equestrienne performances and burlettas of the amphitheatre and distinguishes four periods in the gradual development of the circus into a specific performance art (3).[30] The circus resulted in a hybrid ramification of the culture of spectacle bringing together equestrian shows and skilled variety artist within the same performative space. Yoram S Carmeli notes that it was during the Victorian period it crystallised into a separate performance genre and had its heyday during the second part of the nineteenth century (213). As the nineteenth century evolved, the circus grew into a distinct genre characterised by its specific circular arena, spatial mobility and a proper set of circus numbers – including aerialist performances,

[30] For a full record of the chronological development of the circus see chapter one in Brenda Assael's *The Circus and Victorian Society* (2005). The critic divides the history of the Victorian circus into four key periods; between 1768-1820 it commenced as a theatrical genre in the amphitheatre. Here, equestrian shows like burlettas and *gloires militaires* were staged in a circular arena. Then, 1820-60 other variety artists were incorporated into the act as a compliment to the equestrian number. Later, between 1860-80, variety acts grew more popular then the equestrian show and at the same period important fairs closed. As a consequence several street performers turned to the circus. Finally, from towards the turn of the century (1880-1900) wild animal acts were introduced into the circus. Yoram S. Carmeli claims that it was during the second half of the Victorian era that the circus crystallised into a separate ramification within the world of spectacle (213). The affluence of street artists like clowns, jugglers and tricksters to the circus and the growing popularity of variety acts evidence this. The circus kept its circular arena of the amphitheatre and has turned into a hallmark for the circus.

acrobatic acts and wild animal numbers, just to mention a few – that presented a daring and dangerous spectacle that required skilled, trained and muscular bodies.

The historiography of circus has for long been limited to biographical accounts of circus people who have mostly been presented from a bourgeois point of view. In addition, Carmeli claims, this particular branch of Victorian popular entertainment has been discarded by most critics of theatre studies, popular culture scholars as well as academics concerned with peripatetic people (214-15). The nomadic life of travelling circus companies and the alternative lifestyle it represents have often resulted in a romanticised view of the circus. In Helen Stoddart's words, "the circus self-image is at heart a paradoxical one since it promotes an idea of itself in the popular imagination as embodying a lifestyle unfettered by conventionality or social and legal restraints; a freedom which was echoed in performances which foregrounded the illusion of ease" (Stoddart, *Rings* 175). Its peripheral position to the rest of society in conjunction with the subversive potential of the spectacle in the ring seem to invite for comparisons with Michael Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. In his reading of Rabelais the critic contends, "carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10). The topsy-turvy spectacle in the ring symbolically turned the world upside down; the clowns' subversion of the social order through laughter, the seemingly impossible bodily performances of acrobats and aerialist who defied the physical limits of the human body or wild animal tamers capable of controlling the natural instinct of beast. The circus placed emphasis on the excessive and material representation of the body and human nature, which Assael links to Bakhtin's "grotesque realism" (8-9). For these reasons, several scholars have adopted a carnivalesque focal point in their interpretations of literary representations of the

circus, as will be seen in the ensuing analysis of Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) in chapter 5.1.

Indeed, the Victorian circus defied limits through a carnivalesque mode, nonetheless, the world of the circus also depended on a complex inner hierarchy and spatial organisation. Assael claims that "however the contradictions showcased in the ring pointed to larger contradictions regarding the place of the carnivalesque in this society. In many cases, an act's wondrous quality and its transgressiveness blurred the boundary between respectability and unrespectability, making the circus, in turn, a highly contested institution" (Assael 15). As a performative space the circus is arguably a social space and I will take a closer look at how the circus experience is lived by performers and audience alike by narrowing down my analysis to the female circus artist as she epitomises the transgressive potential of spectacle. Her physical and visual presence in the public sphere and spatial movement during her performance subvert gendered norms and ideological restrictions on women in the Victorian period.

In the beginning of the present century the time was ripe for disciplinary studies of circus history that would regard its artists and performances from new critical perspectives. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, several scholars have made attempts to fill this gap and publications such as Helen Stoddart's *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (2000), Janet M Davis's *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* (2002), Brenda Assael's *The Circus and Victorian Society* (2005) and Paul Bouissac's *Semiotics at the Circus* (2010) testify to this.[31] All the works mentioned here coincide in their treatment of the Victorian circus as a social space which offered possibilities for people who looked for a different lifestyle that did not fit the ideological norm. As Bouissac argues, the circus is inflected

[31] Other volumes that are dedicated to the Victorian circus are Peta Tait's *Wild and Dangerous Performances: Animals, Emotions, Circus* (2011) and Jacky Bratton and Ann Featherstone's *The Victorian Clown* (2006).

with deeper ideological meanings because "[the] circus always takes place within a particular culture and display through its own prism [of] ethical values and social norms, historical and political references, ethic standards [and] the memory of circus tradition itself" (181). Another point discussed by Stoddart, Janet Davis, Assael and Boissac alike, is the social construction of the circus spectacle as they concur in the importance of the audience's role in the conception of the performance.

Considering the semiotics of this branch of Victorian world of spectacle, Bouissac speaks about the circus ring as a socially produced space and highlights how the specific topology of the circus ring is based on an inner structure that "generates a set of topological oppositions that produces spatial meanings" (14). He is particularly interested in how the spatial algorithm of the circus is marked by a symbolic enclosure that is imbued with transgressive movements. Here, the critic stresses how circus artists deal with the continuum of the physical space as actual distances and gravitational forces, and by manipulating discrete semiotic categories such as inside/outside the ring, centre/periphery, diametric/circular movements, horizontal/vertical acts the circus enactment blends the binary oppositions that are conceived as impossible. As Bouissac remarks,

> the spatial categories that are meaningfully manipulated in circus acts are the same as the ones that are cognitively alive in everyday life. But the prism of the circus makes them more salient because it concentrates them in a strongly bounded space whose whole matrix can be perceived in a single vista. (20)

In addition, the spectacular meaning that is produced within the performative space of the circus ring is conceived mainly through sight as the performer plays with the audience visual expectations. Therefore, I am particularly interested in agency, space

and the workings of the gaze to find out how gender is perceived, conceived and lived within the circus ring.

Lately, scholars address circus historiography from perspectives that break with the traditional approaches to circus studies. David Carlyon and Peta Tait draw attention to how up to recently, circus historiography has been notoriously selective and many topics have been overshadowed, in particular issues concerning female performers and sexuality. The combination of femininity, sexuality and public display is one of the main reasons why the enactments of female circus performers in the Victorian era have not been fully examined. On the one hand, scholars have for long held a stereotyped image of the Victorians as prudish and sexually naïve, and on the other hand, the middle-class viewpoint has been regarded as representative for Victorian society at large, and as a consequence, criticism has turned a blind eye to taboo topics.

Carlyon looks into the erasure of sex from nineteenth-century circus performances and insists on how the contemporary apprehension of the Victorian spectator as dull bystander has been distorted,

> whatever issues of taste, morality, gender, or economic empowerment came into play, sexual allusion glimmers through apparent innocence. It also serves as a salutary reminder that nineteenth-century audiences were not naïve rubes . . . clueless bystanders missing references . . . To the contrary, they were as smart, sophisticated, and sexual as ourselves. (47)

Similarly, in his study of corporeality in the circus, Tait argues that, "[c]ulture's memory of muscular bodies appears to be a domain imbued with ideological bias" (28). Both scholars challenge the taboo regarding the sexed feminine body, and as Tait remarks, "culture's capacity to remember seems to be attuned to beliefs about gender and body identity since muscular female bodies have been more easily overlooked with

the passing of time" (26). As argued above, the circus provided a public space where alternative lifestyles to normative ideology were openly exposed. Therefore, it is of great concern for contemporary studies of the female circus performer to pay heed to how this public professional was perceived by the audience, visually conceived in the circus ring and finally how this was experienced by the performer herself during the enactment.

Like other performance categories within the Victorian world of spectacle, the circus was a visual form of entertainment as the numbers on display in the sawdust arena appealed to sight above other senses. Assael stresses how, "the circus spoke to the eye and triggered a system of meaning that had relevance far beyond the ring itself" (8). Similarly, Ann Feathertone claims the spectacle in the ring was surrounded by voyeurism and defines the circus audience specific mode of watching in terms of the gaze arguing, "[the] gaze is speculative . . . it observes and itemises, attracted by the prospect of performance, and is informed by what he already knows about the scenario" ("Peep-Show" 51). Female performers were often represented in an eroticised fashion in the ring, and along these lines Featherstone suggests that circus women were turned into fetishized objects of pleasure ("Peep-Show" 48). These ideas need further consideration as the gaze often is regarded in terms of one-way direction, and more specifically, in the context of the spectacle of the female body, the women performer is often reduced into a sexualized object subjugated to the control of the male gaze. Concurring with Assael, the visual encounter in the circus performance rests upon a set of meanings. Since the public display of the body was rather suggestive than revealed, it could be read in terms of being a strategy to exhibit eroticised bodies to the maximum that was allowed by society's standards (Carlyon 35). In this sense the female circus performer stood on the threshold between respectability and immorality, an idea I will develop in this section.

Assael adapts a new approach to the circus by giving insight into the social history of this performance culture and how its members lived and built its trade. Her study is a significant contribution to circus historiography as she pays attention to the representations and receptions of the acts, as well as, how the spectacle was constructed through the gaze. Framed by the circus ring, the gaze and spectacle are two concepts that are interconnected, and as Assael contends, this is densely charged with social criterion:

> The spectator's "gaze" involved more than just looking: complex feelings of fear, sympathy, lust, awe, bewilderment, and shock arose in the process. This presents methodological questions how the displays were understood and how the audiences and the gazes of individuals in them are "read". I would argue that audiences are more "readable" through the eyes of individual spectators, whose pluralized selves appear in a variety of ways and attitudes, confusing and complicating class identity. Focusing on subjectivity in this way permits an interrogation of those social values that have been used to define the age, such as respectability, progress and improvement, to name a few, and those categories that have been used to delineate social groups within, such as class. (10-11)

As pointed out earlier, the theme of sexuality, particularly the sexualised female body, has been omitted from circus historiography, only to become a key concern for contemporary circus historians. Regarded as improper and treated as a taboo topic, the staging of the female body in an erotised manner was the norm in the Victorian circus. This can be perceived both as a means to attract the male observer appealing to the sexual titillation of the performance, and as a strategy to stifle the potential threat

patriarchal supremacy that female agency in the ring represented. Therefore, I will regard the female circus performer through the lens of the gaze.

The circus as a performative institution encompasses several kinds of spectacle. Although some numbers like lion taming, clowns and fire eating were predominantly male, the circus offered a manifold of professional opportunities for women. Female acrobats, aerialists, equestriennes are three of the most common roles for female performers and they attracted large audiences that felt spurred by the desire to watch women do hazardous acts. In fact, by late nineteenth-century women circus acrobats had gained immense popularity and probably outnumbered male aerial artists (Stoddart, *Rings* 114-15).[32] Assael symbolically calls these circus figures "women on top" (108), and her expression is suitable for these public women taking into consideration their spatial movements and position in the circus ring, as well as their superior corporeality, both as trained athletics and skilled performers. The circus numbers required great physical ability and skill, as well as strength and courage. In the Victorian period these were considered male characteristics, yet female performers had these qualities as well. Stoddart contends that "so not only were these performances sexually transgressive in terms of the nineteenth-century public stage on which, far from any concessions being made to women's lesser strength, they performed the same moves in the same way as men" (*Rings* 175). In other words, the world of the circus erased gender differences regarding ability, skill and corporeality. While some people welcomed this, others felt it as a potential threat to the social order.

[32] There is no fixed number of female artists registered, but historians understand that by late-Victorian era, female acrobats represented fierce competition to men in the profession, as women became the main draw. Senelick goes one step further arguing that the circus was misogynist environment and that female impersonators were preferred to female artists for being more reliable for their physical strength (84).

In the circus ring women had a rare opportunity to experience public agency and physical freedom and to feel liberated from social restrictions. Davis suggests that "[i]n an era when a majority of women's roles were still circumscribed by Victorian ideals of domesticity and feminine propriety, circus women's performances celebrated female powers, thereby presenting a startling alternative to contemporary social norms" (J M Davis 82). Indeed, female circus performers represented a lifestyle that did not correspond to the Victorian ideal of womanhood: pure, chaste, submissive and still. Conversely, the ring represented a "transient and liberating life" in contrast to domesticity (J M Davis 96). In addition, female circus performers could gain financial independence through their earnings and pursue a career of aesthetic fulfilment. Assael compares life at the circus with the music hall arguing, "[l]ike the music hall and other performance trades, the circus depended on artists who observed industrial time-work discipline. As skilled workers, these performers required constant training and practice to perfect and maintain their unique talents" (6). This pinpoints the Victorian world of spectacle as a public space available to female experience, agency and empowerment as a career within the entertainment business required full dedication, hard training and active participation in order to succeed.

As a result, the female circus performer had a strong and muscular body that, taken the aesthetic values at the times, posed a transgressive potential of gender and corporeality. The strong and athletic body of acrobats and aerialists alike was a necessity for their enactments and result from hard continuous training, and is, moreover, closer to the contemporary ideal of the healthy and abled body. In the nineteenth century the muscular feminine body trespassed, as Tait points out, Victorian beliefs of physical features regarding gender and physicality, which proves how "muscular bodies appears to be a domain imbued with ideological bias" (27-28). Since

the muscular female entertainer displayed her skilled body in the ring the audience had the opportunity to linger over her body. Her female body and performance that enhanced her female identity contradicted her muscular corporeality, and as Stoddart argues, "the acrobat's success depended on the performer negotiating various aesthetic codes that sometimes were in conflict" (*Rings* 126). To reinforce that she was a woman, the performer engaged with social codes of femininity striking ladylike poses and body language. The spectator's perception of women's corporeality was disturbed when it did not coincide with the norm, consequently, the arena served as a space of speculation of the female body and gender roles.

Unavoidably, by situating the female body in semi-nude attire in the spotlight the circus performer became the object of the gaze. In many ways, the muscular female body was sexually attenuated and embodied a titillating spectacle for the audience and this was a conscious mode of representation by circus managers. Featherstone claims that strong bodies were represented as an erotic spectacle staged for the male gaze in ways that favoured eroticism above physical skills ("Peep-Show" 48). Yet, Featherstone fails to notice that because the muscular body was in motion instead of a static image, the performance represented voyeuristic pleasure for the observer. Female aerial performers and acrobats were capable of swinging into risky actions and execute perilous manoeuvres. Contrary to Featherstone, Assael recognises the titillation of the active body and argues, "taken together, beauty, flirtation, the thrill, and the strong female body produced complex responses on the part of the viewer, manifested in the gasp, gape, and the widening eyes. In essence this kind of spectatorship became an engrossing and embodied experience" (Assael 109). The way the female muscular body was perceived by the observer, conceived during the act and experienced all together by

the people inside and outside the ring turns the circus into a social space that originates in its performance.

The public display of the female muscular body in the circus ring was perceived as ambiguous as it transgressed corporeal limits of masculinity and femininity for two reasons. First, it made the female body fully visible as the semi-nude circus garb accentuated feminine features. Second, her strong and muscular body was perceived as characteristic of the masculine body. Thus, she simultaneously represented an eroticised spectacle and extended an invitation to curious speculation of the female body. Nevertheless, the circus provided a public space for women in a similar way as the music hall and both environments foregrounded modernity. Bailey maintains that the music hall mirrored the new urban experience both as popular entertainment form and as a highly commercialised institution that anticipated modern showbusiness (106-07). Similarly, Gillian Arrighi remarks that "capitalist market drives and narratives of innovation associated with modernity were embedded within the earliest productions of the circus and were, moreover, an intrinsic feature of the performance genre that came to be known as 'circus'" (176). As argued above, the circus ring served as a performative space where women could act in public and exert agency. In many ways her lifestyle is closer to our contemporary view on health than the Victorian ideal of femininity. Thus, in this sense the female circus artist is an element of modernity in the ring.

The aerialist Lena Jordan, who was member of the family-based troupe the Flying Jordans, was the first woman to execute the triple somersault (Tait 27). The trapeze number requires absolute mastery of acrobatic skills and physical strength that few people would associate with femininity in the Victorian period. In this regard, the audience often speculated on the true sex of female artists questioning whether the

performer was a woman or not, and as Tait remarks, Lena saw herself obliged to provide proof from doctors that she was a woman (Tait 29-30). Another artist, the famous equestrienne and trapeze artist Zaeo,[33] likely excited the imagination of her contemporaries. A poster of Zaeo dressed in her circus garb and in a pose that was perceived as sexually provocative at the time, circulated as semi-pornographic material in the late-Victorian period. The artist represented the direct opposite to the Victorian ideal of femininity and her physicality was closer to our contemporary image of health. Assael suggests that Zaeo anticipated the modern ideal of health arguing,

> while some viewed the acrobat's art as sexually provocative, others saw it as sign of female health, even freedom. The unbearable lightness of Zaeo and other artists prompted some to comment on early feminist ideals . . . The elusive matter of the extent to which the female acrobat saw herself as an object of sexual or athletic interest was addressed in a defensive statement by Zaeo herself. Dismissing the claim of impropriety in her displays, she instead focused on the healthfulness of her work. (124)

Whether being consumed by the male gaze as an erotic object of desire or enthralling circus artist capable of performing daring acts, these public women were immersed in performative space that both made that represented an alternative lifestyle. For this reason, circus women were easily perceived as a threat to patriarchal authority, and as mentioned earlier, the eroticized representation of there stage persona might have been a strategy to restrict her to the position of an eroticised object subordinated to the male gaze, and consequently male control.

I have argued above that the circus offered women the chance to participate in the public sphere and have an individual life peripheral to the normative ideology.

[33] See Zaeo's carte de visite in plate 3 of the appendix.

Notwithstanding, the adverse affect of their public lives was that they faced social stigmatisation for being disrespectable and immoral. Some of the main forces that drove the market were the audience's interest in sexuality, athleticism and danger, which consequently, aroused social concern of female respectability (Assael 114). Just like the actress ran the risk to be associated with prostitution for its apparent parallelism to the trade of procuring – public women offering pleasure in change for money. Therefore, many circus professionals used different strategies to assert respectability. For instance, as Tait explains,

> [the public profile] was justified in newspaper reports by an accompanying narrative about their off-stage obedience to male trainers, which implied their social submissiveness. Displays of muscularity and physicality were central to popular entertainment by late nineteenth century, but have been glossed over in subsequent cultural narratives of female physicality. Female muscularity in particular may have disappeared from cultural memory because of its larger social significance in challenging restrictions on female body development. (Tait 33-34)

Other strategies, similar to those used by actresses, was to spread rumours claiming that the circus star was on the threshold of getting married. The different kinds of attempts to ensure respectability prove that the circus was not free from prejudices and disapproval.

One of the main reasons behind the social disesteem of the female circus performer was her unconventional costume. Unlike the strict dress-code for Victorian women that imposed wearing corsets that limited physical movement or long dresses that covered their bodies, the current fashion for female figures in the circus ring included tight-fitting garments, short sleeves and skirts which created the overall

impression of bareness. The circus had their proper set of morals, and, as Davis notes, there was a lack of regulations of dress in the circus (J M Davis 139). People in the trade designed the costumes and the typical circus garbs were tight fitting almost imitating nudity. Taken the strict morality of the Victorian era the semi-nude circus acrobat in the arena represented an erotic element. This met both approval and disapprobation as the circus offered an eroticised spectacle justified as entertainment, which was not welcomed by defenders of moral purity. However, the light and tight dress was also functional as the performers needed costumes that allowed physical mobility for the sake of safety. This, argues Carlyon, allowed a public display of the body as it was suggestive instead of revealed, and this was a strategy to exhibit eroticised bodies to the maximum allowed by society's standards (35). In spite of stimulating social concern of respectability and assaulted for being visually immoral, the semi-nude dress was functional as the standard apparel of Victorian fashion for women endangered the lives of female circus artists.

Women who were unconventionally dressed on the stage – the actress, the ballet danseuse, the music-hall entertainer and the circus artist – were all attenuated sexual allure. Yet, the revealing costume in circus differed from the rest due to the fact that it could plead utility and presenting the legitimate claim that the efficiency and safety of the performer required scant clothing (Carlyon 35). This is true, notwithstanding, the circus garb was also intentionally designed to provoke sexual desire. For instance, while tight leotards may be functional, there is no practical reason for dying them in the colour of the flesh. On the contrary, as Featherstone notices, this was to create the illusion of naked flesh, which consequently extended an invitation to the male gaze to linger over the female body ("Peep-Show" 53). Undoubtedly, the semi-nude female body on display in the circus ring was conceived as an object for the male gaze.

However, Featherstone draws on Laura Mulvey's "to-be-looked-at-ness" which connotes that woman has been staged as a passive object for the male gaze, and consequently, she becomes subjected to male power (Mulvey 19). The scholar is mainly concerned with cinema and the power relations that are at work in constructing female bodies as a commercial spectacle. Moreover, Mulvey's afterthoughts published in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1981) reconsidered earlier work on woman as image and man as bearer of the look by incorporating the idea of woman as producer of meaning: "[the female character] may find herself secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides" (Mulvey 29). Her claim is significant as she acknowledges the female performer as active agent on stage and in this regard the active/passive dichotomy is embedded in the visual order that supports the power dynamics of spectacle. Even though Mulvey's definition of the male gaze restricts women to a passive role, this specific mode of looking is applicable to other genres within the world of spectacle. For instance, Featherstone validates the male objectifying gaze as an inherent part of the circus spectacle stating,

> though not immediately passive subjects, [circus women] were in fact presented as sexualised objects for male consumption. This positioning of spectator and subject in popular entertainments, the removal of the real or putative proscenium and the invasion of the performance space (real or putative) by the spectator, creates shifting dynamics. (48)

Her argument is of interest as she acknowledges the female circus performer as an active subject as well as the dynamic interplay between the audience and artist. The circus artist could subvert the power of the gaze as using it as a means to attract attention to her performatory skills.

Muscular performances in the circus presented instances of gender transgression, both male and female. On occasions acrobatic numbers were carried out in conventional clothing in order to enhance the artistic talent of the artist and her physical ability (J M Davis 104-05). Although on a surface level this seemed to comply with the social norm, it was highly subversive as it overturned the domestic ideal of womanhood as she performed somersaults and swung through the air instead of remaining passive and still in the private realm. Stoddart proposes that this created a tension in the audience as the acrobat was simultaneously ladylike and sexually provocative, and this, "made her task of aesthetic negotiation inherently problematic and complex" (*Rings* 126). In other words this undermined the public/private dichotomy as physically superior women took active participation in the public realm, which meant that women could trespass gender boundaries such as spatial restriction to the domestic sphere.

The vulnerability of beautiful young women performing hazardous acts in the trapeze or on horseback produced sensation and evoked the audience sympathy in ways that male artist did not achieve to the same extent. As the muscular female body created great gender confusion and some male performers took advantage of this using gendered disguise. By the mid- and late-Victorian period there were some noteworthy cases of female impersonating in the circus. Laurence Senelick calls attention to two cross-dressing circus performers: the equestrienne Ella Zoraya (1840-79), billed "Is she a boy or a girl?", and the aerialist M'lle Lulu who was obliged to reveal that he was a man after an accident that required medical examination (84). Whereas Zoraya represented a sexual enigma by creating an androgynous stage persona, M'lle Lulu entertained the audience under the illusion of being a woman. These were not isolated cases and Senelick relates cross-dressing in the circus to homosexual undercurrents in

the circus and argues that this has been a neglected field in circus historiography (84).[34] Nevertheless, independently of the sexual orientation of the artist, female impersonation in the circus stages instances of gender transgression and defies inscriptions of social values on the gendered body. What is particularly interesting is how these circus performances enact, transcend and erase "visually recognisable gender codes" (Stoddart, *Rings* 173).

At the turn of the century, the equestrienne Miss Daisy (1884-1962) who performed as a woman in the circus arena, was in real life Albert Hogdini, a married man and father of two children. Like M'lle Lulu, Miss Daisy acted as a woman using disguise as well as performing femininity, and in doing so, often complied with social norms. Davis highlights how Albert Hogdini's "potential ability to cross gender boundaries was limited, paradoxically, by the very gender norms that his acts denaturalized . . . because his gender play suggested that there was a single standard of appropriate female appearance and comportment" (J M Davis 115). Yet, as Senelick emphasises, feminine disguise was used to enhance the skill of the acrobat and the equestrian (Senelick 83). This interspersed Victorian gender roles and view on female physicality with performativity. I have argued above that female aerialists woke the audience interest and spurred the observers' curiosity as she manifested that the female body was perfectly capable of performing the same dangerous acts as men. The muscular bodies posed both an eroticised and unnerving spectacle as it contradicted the ideology of domesticity and corporeal beauty for women. Cross-dressing artists in the

[34] It was not until the early twenty century that the first drag performance took place in the ring. Barbette (1898-1973) was a female impersonator and trapeze artist who performed in full drag revealing his male identity at the end of the act. Stoddart claims that this foregrounded transvestism and was transgressive in a dual sense. First, Babette performed as acrobat, and second, s/he performed femininity (*Rings* 173).

circus display instances of gender transgression in a two-fold sense as the female impersonators enact femininity and reveal gender as socially constructed in the process.

3.2.3. The Freak Performer

Leslie Fielder was the first scholar to break the tradition of freak-show studies and approach the history of the freak show in an innovative way. In *Freaks and Images of the Secret Self* (1978) the critic defends the freak performer against the establishment and its monster mongers and managers. For the first time a scholar delved into the psychological depth of enfreakment by switching the focus from the human exhibit to the observer, arguing that the practice of watching visually different teaches as much about ourselves as of them. A decade later, Robert Bogdan's *Freak Show* (1988) took on where Fielder had left off introducing the idea that the freak figure is a social construct. Bogdan's study has paved the way for a new tradition of freak studies for others to follow. Rachel Adams and Rosemarie-Garland Thomson, in particular, insist on the humanity of the performer rather than regarding it in metaphorical terms, and this is an issue at the heart of contemporary research into the Victorian freak show. There has been a prevailing focus on the American freak history until recently; yet, more scholars are directing their attention towards freak culture in a European context – cultural historians like Marlene Tromp, Anna Kérchy and Andrea Zittlau, as well as literary scholar Lilian Craton – just to mention a few. This new European-centred approach is welcome to current critical inquires into freak-show culture as this tradition of scrutinising human oddities is ideologically inflected. Currently, there is a growing interest in tracing the development of freak iconography to remodel the underlying structure that supports the social construction of human oddities. The concern of re-

humanisation of freak-show exhibits benefit from being regarded in a socio-cultural context as it offers insight into the cultural frame of mind both of the nineteenth-century and the present as it raises questions regarding human status and value.

Physically divergent bodies have aroused fear, fascination and wonder for centuries, and as Margrit Shildrick notes, the allure by human oddities has haunted the Western imagination since its earliest records (9). The history of the public display of human oddities is long and complex and has intrigued and interested people as it interrogates both humanity and normalcy of the ablebodied. The freak show can be traced back to the public display of human exhibits for entertainment at fairs and market places; however, just like the circus it was first in the nineteenth century that the freak show turned into an organised form of spectacle. In spite of their differences, the circus and the freak show were popular amusements that were often displayed together and the freak show was often placed as a side show to the circus spectacle. While the focus was on the corporeal skill of the athletic body at the circus, the disability of the abject and divergent body was the focal point in the side show. As an adjacent spectacle to the circus – an entertainment form that was peripheral to normative society – the side show was symbolically placed at the outmost margin of society. However, the freak show was not limited to an auxiliary amusement to the circus and freak shows did tour as a separate entertainment as well. In Victorian Britain freak exhibitions took place in music-halls, museums, exhibitions and medical theatres, which placed the divergent body close proximity to normative and society and in direct contact with the audience.

The freak show as such was a particular form of visual amusement that displayed divergent people for profit and saw its heyday in the Victorian period. This is not a coincidence, and as Garland-Thomson observes, it developed within a society of modernisation that promoted sameness and standardisation as a form of cultural value,

and here, the singular and deviant represented a social anxiety as it questioned regularized normalcy (*Staring* 11). In addition to this, the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) did not only lead to a crisis of faith, but it also awoke people's interest in the scientific explanation of the human body. Consequently, scientific knowledge eclipsed religious mystery and relocated the freakish body from wonder to error (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 13). This implied that the nineteenth-century debate was concerned with the status of the human being in relation to other humans and animals, which caused a scientific fervour to find the missing link between animals and humans. Subsequently, the freakish body became a site of negotiation and contestation of humanity and the freak show offered a public space where people could scrutinise the physically strange.

Perception varies over time, and arguably, the disabled body is conditioned by cultural norms and thus, socially constructed. Garland-Thomson highlights that "[the] freak discourse is both imbricated in and reflective of our collective cultural transformation into modernity" (Introduction 3). As hinted at above, the nineteenth-century freak discourse developed within the context of the Industrial Revolution and scientific progress that categorised physical divergence into nature's mistake or nature's throwbacks. Bogdan contends that the freak is a cultural construct and the perception of the exceptional human body is culturally bound. The critic explains how the status of freak is actually a performative identity: "freak is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people. It is not a person but an enactment of a tradition, *the performance of a stylized representation*" (Bodgan, "The Social Construction of Freaks" 35). The aim behind the nineteenth-century freak show was to visually emphasise physical markers and traits that distinguished them as freaks. In other words, it largely consisted in an act of specular dehumanisation for financial

profit. In many ways, the side show was a exploitative space and for this reason many critics have linked this kind of spectacle to consumerism and objectification. Yet, I wish to take a closer look at the performer behind the freak by examining the theatrical representation of human deviance.

At present scholars coincide in their consideration of the freak as a socially constructed category that is shaped by its contemporary cultural condition, and regarding the Victorian freak performer the side show provides the ideal space to study the process of enfreakment. The freak show constituted an integrate part of the nineteenth-century world of spectacle, and, as I will argue, served as a public and social space of negotiation, appropriation and subversion as physically impaired people found an opportunity to exert agency and make their voice heard in public on the freak-show stage. The spatial practice of exhibiting human oddities for amusement brings together how disability is culturally perceived, visually conceived and experienced, i.e. lived, and thereby envisions Lefebvre's notion of triadic space.

First, spatial practice within the context of enfreakment heralds the interpretation and perception of humanity and normalcy by bringing the extraordinary body to the forefront. The freak show provided a space of bodily perception in the sense that deviant corporeality was represented for interpretation of normalcy and humanity. The audience read and interpreted the abject and strange body by scrutinising human oddities in a performative space, a practice that Marlene Tromp refers to as "an epistemological speculation" (8). The need to categorise human bodies into the stratum of normalcy is put to the test at the freak show as rather than providing answers, it destabilises the viewer's expectations of what is displayed on stage. In Anna Kérchy and Andrea Zittlau's words, "freakery emblematizes an 'in-between being' simultaneously indicating and imperilling the physical, psychic, conceptual limits,

which divide the subject from ambiguitites beyond normal, knowable, visible human subjectivity, and outside its corporeal limits effecting the lived and represented identity" (2-3). Thus the spatial practice within the freak show consist in a reading and interpretation of the strange body to make sense of the world we live in, but what is more, it offers a mirror of interpretation of the self and normalcy.

Second, the freak exhibit was conceived as a form of popular entertainment and this spectacular space was represented as a theatrical display of selfhood. Accordingly, the arrangement of the exhibition was reminiscent of the structure of theatre as it consisted of a stage with an auditorium. In addition, the body itself becomes a site of ideological inscription and as Grosz sustains "the imaginary autonomy is an internalized image or map of the meaning that the body has for the subject, for others in its social world, and for the symbolic order conceived in its generality (that is for a culture as a whole)" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 39-40). Therefore, I wish to link Grosz's conception of the corporeality to Lefebvre's conceptual dimension of space as enfreakment is conceived through a stylised representation of the body by turning it to a space of ethical values. As Craton notices, "by mapping its social concern onto the unusual body, a society strengthens its sense of control. The unusual body is defined by the ideology of its historical moment, but also serves as tool in the definition of that ideology by facilitating discussion and negotiation of key ideological terms" (5). Thus sociological and cultural values were mapped onto both the performative site and the performers' bodies. The conception of the freakish body is shaped within an ideological framework that seeks to assert borders of normal/abnormal, human/non-human and I/the abject other.

Third, when Lefebvre refers to representational space he speaks about functional and lived space. Here, I will focus on the freakish body as a culturally inscribed space

and regard how corporeality is experienced by the performer and the audience. In these lines, I will apply Garland-Thomson's notion of the stare to consider enfreakment as a social act of negotiation of both freak status and of humanity that involves both the performer and spectator. In this sense, the actual performance of freak identity brings into practice perception and conception in a visual encounter that is characterised in terms of staring. I will adopt Garland-Thomson's notion of the stare in my approach to the visual encounter that occurs within the realm of human exhibitions. In *Staring: How We Look* (2009) the scholar defines the stare as "an ocular response to what we don't expect to see . . . we stare when ordinary seeing fails, when we want to know more" (*Staring* 3). The stare provides a feasible critical tool to examine the subjectivity and agency of freak performers. This social practice takes place within a densely voyeuristic space as the freak show, which culminates in the act of staring; spatial practice and representations of space converge in this third dimension of representational space where the performative space and the freak performer constitute a site of negotiation. Garland-Thomson distinguishes the stare for being "an encounter between a starer and a staree [that] sets in motion an intrapersonal relationship . . . this intense visual engagement creates an circuit of communication and meaning-making. Staring becomes involvement, and being stared at demands response (*Staring* 3).

As stated above, freak identity is created and modified through the use of performative strategies, whereby it relies heavily upon theatricality. Bogdan stresses how a specific public freak identity was created for the human exhibits on display and they were expected to perform accordingly ("The Social Construction of Freaks" 25). This advocates a performative identity, which Fretz denominates "theatrical selfhood" (106). I find this a fitting label for the freak performer's identity as it regards the subjectivity of the human exhibit on display, and in doing so opens up for the possibility

that this performative space was a site of agency for disabled people—an idea I will develop later.

Invoking William Gresham's distinction between born freaks, made freaks or novelty acts, scholars coincide in that their roles were enhanced by means of theatrical strategies using scenery effects, disguise and stage props.[35] Two typical modes of representation were the exotic and the aggrandised display (Bogdan, *Freak Show* 234-35), which consisted in staging the human exhibit in was that highlighted features such as physical abnormality or gender transgression. Whereas the exotic mode exaggerated the human exhibit's difference in terms of inferiority to the audience, the aggrandised modes laid claim to the freak's superiority (Bodgan, "The Social Construction of Freaks" 29). For instance, people with physical anomalies as hypertrichosis terminalis, i.e. excessive facial and body hair, or syndactyly, i.e. webbed fingers or toes, were staged as missing links between man and animal engaging this way with the scientific discourse of the era. Other side-show spectacles consisted of freaks with corporeal deviances who performed songs, dances, circus acts or delivered monologues in several different languages that served as a stark contrast to their physical condition. Thus, the freak performer's show on stage consisted in an active enactment of an identity, rather than a static display of oddity, which interlocked with Victorian ideological investments of normalcy and deviance of humanity. Whether exotic or aggrandised configurations, both modes of representations testify to the performativity that underpin enfreakment, and as Bodgan explains, "'[f]reak' is a way of thinking, of presenting, a set of practices, an institution – not a characteristic of an individual. Freak shows can teach us not to confuse the role a person plays with who he really is" (*Freak Show* 10). Therefore, it is

[35] In William Gresham's *Monster Midway* (1948) we encounter the first categorisation of freaks into born (pathological diseases, corporeal deviance, race), made (self-inflicted or caused disability), novelty acts (extraordinary enactments) (100-02).

not a person's particular disability that turns them into a freak; instead it is the specific mode of representation that is the crucial factor.

For this reason, several critics have argued for the career possibility in the side show of physically and mentally impaired people in the Victorian period. Performative spaces like the circus side show and freak exhibitions were among the few opportunities for disabled persons to earn money and with that personal independence. Bogdan argues that on stage they were active performers who participated in the creation of their stage persona (Bogdan, "The Social Construction of Freaks" 27). Occasionally, some gained fame and fortune turning into acclaimed celebrities, as for example, little people as General Tom Thumb or Minnie Warren. In spite of being an exploitative and cruel practice, Bogdan remarks that the world of spectacle provided a world of refuge for the impaired since they found others that were similarly situated to them there, and conversely "as the freaks sat on the platform, most looked down on the audience with contempt . . . [which] was that of insiders toward the uninitiated" ("The Social Construction of Freaks" 35). In this sense, this critic's argument singles out the freak show as a chance for disabled people to build a career to pursue of stardom, independence and personal fulfilment by gaining a place and a voice in the public sphere.

Notwithstanding, Bodgan's claim has proved vulnerable to criticism, as several scholars have questioned the degree of volition of the freak to be displayed for financial profit. David Gerber interrogates Bogdan's account of the freak show as career for disabled people defying his claim that the freak show attributed human oddities agency and a voice in the public sphere. Conversely, Gerber explains how "consent theory arouse in a society in which most people – women, children, the indigent and impoverished – were only normally free and actually had little, if any, choice in giving

their consent to the social arrangements into which they were born" (41). Instead, he perceives the freak show as exploitative and derogatory for disabled people. Similarly, Craton acknowledges how the most troublesome aspect of the freak show resides in the fact that "the odd body is merely an object, deprived of will. Presented under the gaze of middle-class consumers, [the freak] entertains [the] audience and validates normalcy without any voice in how . . . difference is perceived" (Craton 2). Yet, the freak show must be read beyond middle-class norms and this seems to be the flaw in Gerber's claim. Even though the critic rightfully insists on the exploitative nature of this particular entertainment form, he fails to recognise the specific nature of freak-show performances that, as I will argue later, share many characteristics with music-hall dynamics. Here, Craton follows in the lines of Bogdan, as she perceives the freakish body beyond the idea of seeing it as a mere foil to middle-class normative culture by posing the question "what if an odd body could influence normative culture, not just as a transgression, but through subtle connections with and variations upon normative ideals" (4). Craton points at the freak show as an important mirror of the social ideals and normative ideology of the Victorian period and anticipates the freak as an integrate component in the perception of disability. This is where Gerber, in my opinion, fails to recognise the disabled person as an active agent in the creation of his or her stage persona.

In their exploration of the cultural history of enfreakment in a European context, Kérchy and Zittlau detail that "[a]lthough Continental European freaks are introduced as products of ideologically-infiltrated representations, they also emerge as embodied subjects endowed with their own voice, wiev, and subversive agency" (11). This statement provides an apt answer to Gerber as it recognises not the volition but the agency of the human oddity on display. As Bogdan has noted, the freak looked back at

the audience and here the stare invites for, as Garland-Thomson suggests, a "dynamic struggle" (*Staring* 3). Following the lines of Bogdan and Garland-Thomson, I propose that the speculative, unexpected and sensational encounter at the freak show provides a social space in public where the starer (audience) and staree (freak performer) are able to make sense of human deviance through a visual speculation of the extraordinary body.

Marlene Tromp and Karyn Valerius admit how the freak performer was inevitably exploited and that an asymmetrical power balance between audience and human exhibit prevailed, yet, as the critics insist, the materialisation of the socio-political difference between ablebodied and impaired in the freak show ". . . was always heavily inflected by social engagement. Freaks provoked both identification and disavowal" (Tromp and Valerius 9). Similarly, Rachel Adams challenges the notion of the freak show as a silent and static passive display of persons with pathological disorders and suggests that freak enactments relied deeply on audience engagement. Here, she proposes that the spectacle of extraordinary people consisted of an interaction between the actor and audience that dissolved stable boundaries between the self and the other – the normal and the pathological (Adams 31). These observations are significant as they pinpoint a mutual engagement in the social construction of the freak, i.e. enfreakment, and more so, this discloses that the human exhibit is an active agent in the spectacle. Moreover, the freak performer's agency is recovered through the act of staring in the dynamic interplay between the starer and staree – a visual interrelationship reminiscent of the music-hall dynamics of verbal interchange between the performer and audience.

In these lines, Eric Fretz remarks that "[c]ultural meanings is the result of negotiation between the audience's and the performer's interpretation" (Fretz 105-06).

The critic supports the idea of a dialogue between the spectator and person on stage, which points at freak actor's agency. However, Fretz claims that neither the seer nor the seen is in control over the perception of their bodies, and this is, in my opinion, not fully accurate. Conversely, the stylised modes of representation applied in the freak show were targeted to manipulate the audience into perceiving the performer as a freak. Hence, as the human exhibit on stage plays with spectators' expectations and beliefs, he or she engages with a shared knowledge, that it is a question of enactment of corporeality and identity. In other words, knowingness, the trademark of music hall, is applicable to freak exhibitions as well. In the process the performer plays upon the audience's knowledge of the human body and its expectations about the unexpected, strange and alien in order to arouse sensation, fear and fascination that stretch beyond scopic pleasure.

Grosz contends that "[h]uman oddities are not a mere question about voyeurism. It is also an issue that intertwines psychical, physical, and conceptual *limits* of human subjectivity ("Intolerable Ambiguity" 55). The critic is particularly interested in the ways corporeality is lived and represented by the visually different, and how this, in turn, is inscribed on the subject's identity. While on display, the performer engages in an interplay with the audience regarding corporeality, normalcy and humanity. Through a dynamic struggle on determining the identity of the exhibit on stage and the body's relevance to that, the staree internalises the starer's perception. In this sense, both the discourse and performance that support enfreakment are circumscribed by negotiation, interpretation and discussion.

Bogdan outlines the specific performance pattern that underpinned the freak show. It started with an introduction of the subject who delivered a short monologue with biographical details. It was followed by a description of their physical condition

and at this point they normally quoted scientists and doctors, which were supported by pamphlets and that vouched for their authenticity. Finally, the performer would perform some kind of enactment, like singing a song or reciting poem that celebrated the exhibit on stage. Nevertheless, as Bogdan reveals, "these 'true life' pamphlets were filled with exaggeration, fabrications and out-and-out lies" (*Freak Show* 19). Similar to music-hall characterisation, the freak performer played a role which consisted in appearing in character and on occasions deliver a song or poem that reinforced the staged identity. This pinpoints enfreakment as an epitomised process of theatrical selfhood.

Several critics draw attention to the extraordinary body as a distorted mirror image of the ablebodied. Craton emphasises how "displays of physical difference serve to demarcate the culturally drawn boundaries between categories of normal and abnormal and thus confirm the self-satisfaction of those close to the norm" (35). In other words, by scrutinising the visually different body the observer confirms his or her own normalcy. In her consideration of monsters and monstrosity, Shildrick denotes the ambiguous repulsion and attraction of the abject other stating, "non-normative natures and bodies with an appeal to their recognisable everyday or cultured attributes . . . drew the spectators at the same time as astounding them" (24). The critic draws on Jacques Lacan's mirror stage in her examination of the relationship between the self and the other in the context of corporeal disability. According to Lacan the mirror stage is as a process in which "we note that the image in the mirror is reversed, and we may see in this at least a metaphorical representation of the structural reversal we have demonstrated in the ego as the individual's physical reality" (Lacan 15). Hence, the exhibition of the visually different for public scrutiny served as a mirror for the to make sense of one's identity. In agreement with this idea, Shildrick stresses how the unusual body served as a foil to the ablebodied as normalcy was fixed in a standard European

model (28). Although the critic rightfully points out how the freak show worked as a mirror in which viewers could assert their own normalcy, this theory is seemingly ignorant of the displayed person is reduced to an objectified victim of the gaze.

Craton views the freakish body beyond the idea of seeing it as a mere foil to middle- class normative culture by posing the question "what if an odd body could influence normative culture, not just as a transgression, but through subtle connections with and variations upon normative ideals" (4). Craton points at the freak show as an important mirror of the social ideals and normative ideology of the Victorian period and anticipates the freak as an integrate component in the perception of disability, an idea I will return to later. Speaking about volition and agency in the context of an exploitative institution as the freak show is a controversial task and I do not discard the fact that human oddities were victims of the cruel practice of gawping at disabled people for amusement. Notwithstanding, we ought to consider the drawbacks of limiting use of the gaze as the theoretical tool to carry out research of freak-show exhibitions.

Speaking about the gaze implies a reduction of the disabled person into a victimised object that lack agency in the formation of his or her identity. Shildrick claims that,

> like the biomedical gaze which manages monstrosity either by examining bodies of the dead by reducing the living to categories of knowledge, the freakshow, for all its play with the flexibility of the boundaries between them and us, is finally no more than a safely contained and distanced display that seeks to sanitise the contaminory potential of the anomalous other. (24)

Similarly, Grosz argues that the freak exhibit represents a ghostly double or Doppelgänger of our own imperfection as well as the fear of assimilating our alien otherness "the mirror-image threatens to draw us into a spell of spectral doubling,

annihilating the self that wants to see itself reflected" ("Intolerable Ambiguity" 65). Whereas the critics concur in how the abject or grotesque body represents our inner fears of awareness of our own imperfections, Shildrick limits her study of the disabled body to the gaze, and as a consequence, she fails to recognise the agency that supports the performative identity of the freak. Paradoxically, the scholar admits that "relatively few of those displayed were passive objects; they were performers engaged not only in showing off their anomalies, but in singing, sewing, dancing, feeding children, conversing in foreign languages, and in every possible way bypassing putative handicaps of their extraordinary bodies" (Shildrick 24). Indeed, the freak was not merely a passive object on display and because of this we can speak about agency and subjectivity of disabled people within the world of spectacle. The complimentary enactments served as a theatrical strategy to enhance freak status, which was achieved by manipulating the audience's visual perception of what was enacted on stage. Garland-Thomson argues that while the gaze is an oppressive act of objectification, one that subordinates the visual object into a victim (*Staring* 9), the stare reveals several layers of intense looking that all engage in a social exchange in which both the starer and the staree participate (*Staring* 10-11). Craton stresses that "an engaged starer is open to learning from difference" (18), and this hints at the dialogic relationship that the act of staring invites for.

For this reason Garland-Thomson's theory of the stare represents an adequate approach to the culture of enfreakment because the stare, and the dynamic struggle of subjectivity and objectification it entails, represents a mode of watching that attributes the human exhibit with agency. As the subtitle of *Staring: How We Look* suggests, staring is an act of being looked at and of looking back at, and therefore, the inquisitive visual encounter in the freak show asserts a social space where our corporeal conception

and bodily perception stipulate the identity of both starer and staree. Grosz, who considers the sexed body as a social construct, acknowledges social space as a crucial factor for the constitution of corporeality,

> A subjective or imaginary sense of spatiality is the precondition of the intersubjective or shared (social) space required for all symbolic interactions and for an objective and scientific (i.e. measurable, quantifiable) form of space. The virtual duplication of the subject's body, the creation of a symmetry measured from the mirror plane, is necessary for these more sophisticated, abstract, and derivate notions of spatiality. (Grosz, *Volative Bodies* 45)

Thus, this invites for a reading of the freak show as a social space where the marginalised other finds the opportunity to exert agency and contribute to his or her own subjectivity through the act of staring. As Garland-Thomson asserts, "[t]he visually disabled body intrudes our routine visual landscape and compels our attention . . . and the appearance of disability in the public sphere makes, then, for a stareable sight" (*Staring* 20). The human oddity on display invites for a dialogue as he or she stares back at the audience and while doing so, the performer also makes meaning of the self in a dynamic and interactive practice of staring that attributes him or her with space and a voice within the public sphere.

In the beginning of the present chapter I set out to give an overview of the Victorian world of spectacle to find out how women working within public spaces of display appropriated a female space within the public sphere. By taking a closer look at three female performers – the music-hall actress, circus artist and freak exhibit – I have found that these three categories claimed their presence, articulated voice and wielded influence on the spectator. In my regard of the popular leisure spaces I have attempted to dissociate the female performer from the prostitute arguing that the parallel between

these two public women is an immoderate identification that is bound to class perceptions. I have claimed that the concern for respectability was one of the driving factors behind the association between women working within the world of spectacle and fallen women. Subsequently, I have linked this moral anxiety to the Victorian middle class and questioned its applicability to the working-class culture. Taken this as a stating point, I have argued that the public/private dichotomy was a purely bourgeois concept, and thus a dysfunctional doctrine for the labouring classes who had their proper set of values and view on respectability.

The world of spectacle provided a public space for women where they could negotiate agency, voice and subjectivity by interlocking with the underlying power structures of different modes of watching. From subverting the gaze to engaging in staring, female performers engaged the spectators in a visual negotiation of her identity and in doing so asserted an active role within the public domain. Placing the female body in focus, and often engaging the audience in a titillating spectacle, female artist have been regarded as disrespectable and immoral, ideas that are tied in a bourgeois set of values that favours chastity, passivity, submissiveness and domesticity for women. The stage provided a liminal space where women could transgress gender norms to appropriate a female space within the public sphere by claiming presence, articulating voice and exerting agency on stage. The music-hall actress, circus artist and freak-show performer all relied on theatrical strategies and insight into the power dynamics of different modes of watching to manipulate the audience and, in doing so, subvert gender restrictions that delimited women within binary divisions as male/female, public/private, active/passive and subject/object.

4. State of the Art: Neo-Victorianism in the Twenty-First Century

Contemporary authors reiterate the Victorian period to deconstruct a stereotyped and fixed image of our nineteenth-century ancestors and offer new alternative accounts of the historical past. Straddling history and fiction, the past and the present, neo-Victorianism is a hybrid genre that conceives a literary space in-between, namely the Victorian period and our own. Whether retrieving previously marginalised people from oblivion or articulating the Victorians' dirty secrets, neo-Victorianism is far more complex than a contemporary return to the past or a nostalgic yearning for a bygone time. The revisionary project sustaining neo-Victorian inquiries into the past engages with the inherent performativity of the genre and it provides a fruitful ground to explore space and gender as well as the public/private dichotomy. By establishing a link between the past and the present contemporary authors manage to explore the spatialising of subjective identities. As argued in previous chapters this gendered ideology was constantly under pressure and has proved to be rather porous than rigid. Moreover, my discussion of female urban figures in chapter 3 has demonstrated that borders were not immutable and women constantly crossed the threshold into the public domain. The neo-Victorian novel, thus, changes the focus from exclusion to inclusion.

Firstly, I will describe how neo-Victorianism settled into a separate sub-genre of historical fiction and how since the turn of the twentieth century has pushed forward away from postmodernism drawing on the work of Ann Heilmann, Mark Llewellyn, Louisa Hadley and Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham among others. Then I will proceed to consider mode and some of the key tenets that underpin the performative literary mode I find so central to the genre. Next, I will argue that the performative mode grants women writers of historical fiction immense possibilities to explore how

space and gender intertwine in the social construction of identity. Finally I will look into the growing fascination with the Victorian world of spectacle in neo-Victorian fiction in an attempt to discover why feminist writers in particular find entertainment spaces in the Victorian period so appealing. In the process authors destabilise the boundaries of categories as space and gender, as well as blurring the lines between fact and fiction, the past and the present in a highly performative manner to turn the Victorians into a spectacle for the contemporary reader—the principal argument in this chapter.

Historical literature is currently in vogue in British fiction and authors manifest a deep concern for history, memory and the past as it stands in relationship to the present. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods put emphasis on historical discernment and re-memory of past arguing that historical fiction is "highly conflictive struggle over what should remembered and what forgotten" (1). The prevalence of the past in contemporary literature proffers readings of memory as a mediator between the past and the present, and different levels of memory, from personal to collective and cultural has had a significant impact on canon formation and academic research in the twenty-first century. The postmodern problematic of historical knowledge has given cue to the current interest in the historical past in fiction and the emergence of fields such as trauma studies, biofiction and neo-Victorianism.

Linda Hutcheon's seminal work *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) represents a point of reflection in the postmodern academic panorama as it paved the way for new readings of the relationship between fiction and history. She states, "historiographic metafiction suggests the continuing relevance of [the] opposition [between fiction and fact], even if it be a problematic one. Such novels both install and the blur the line between fiction and history. . . . [with an] intense self-

consciousness about the way in which its all done" (113). While Hutcheon's study approaches the relationship between fiction and history in new ways, it is rooted in postmodern criticism of historical representation. Nearly a decade later in the 1990s, neo-Victorianism sparked off into a proliferation of novels that engaged with the Victorian period. Previously, several authors had turned to the Victorian era in their novels; two of the earliest examples are Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) that were later followed by Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1982) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), just to mention a few. Since then, a massive amount of novels that engage with the Victorian era have been published and the "extraordinary consumer demand for Victorian instances" that started in the 1990s still enjoy mainstream popularity today (Sadoff and Kucich xi). John Glendening holds that the neo-Victorianism although lacking a generic term in the 1990s came fully into its own by late 1980s (8). However, I would rather suggest that the nodal point of the development of neo-Victorian literature is situated in the 1990s as it is from this point onwards that neo-Victorianism gradually has established itself as a separate ramification of historical fiction within the academia towards crystallising into a field of study in it own full right in the twenty-first century.

Many critics have noted that the popularity of neo-Victorian literature is to a great extent indebted to A. S. Byatt's Man-Booker awarded *Possession: A Romance* (1990). The story combines two separate plot lines that straddle the Victorian period and the late twentieth century depicting two scholars' academic inquiry into the past in hunt for facts that help them reconstruct a secret and romantic relationship between two poets. It has been critically acclaimed for blending the limits between fact/fiction and the impossibility to obtain historical knowledge. This novel's treatment of the past and

portrayal of academic research reflects the growing interest in history at the time it was written. As Frederick Holmes notes, "many contemporary novelists and theorists grapple with this problem of historicism, the sceptical view that objective knowledge of history is impossible because knowledge itself is a product of history" (12). The different reasons for recycling the Victorian period and the various modes of narration applied by these authors anticipate the complex ramification of modes and sub-categories within neo-Victorian genre.[36]

Parallel to the growing critical response to neo-Victorianism runs the struggle with terminology and definitions to define this relatively new historical sub-genre. It was first coined as neo-Victorianism by Dana Shiller in her seminal article "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel" (1997) in which she uses the definition arguing that "these historical novels take a revisionist approach to the past, borrowing from postmodern historiography to explore how present circumstances shape historical narrative, and yet are also indebted to earlier cultural attitudes toward history" (540). In a longstanding debate, her term has been favoured by most and today neo-Victorianism is widely accepted and used within and without the academia to describe literature that returns to the Victorian period for different purposes.

Andrea Kirchknopf alerts attention to the wide range of different perspectives on what she calls "the postmodern rewrites of Victorian texts" and offers an outline of the different labels used by critics. She ponders on the question "is it *Victoriana*, *Victoriographies*, *retro-*, *neo-*, or *post-Victorian* novels we encounter when we read rewritings of the Victorian era?" (Kirchknopf 2). In the 1990s the terminology was still a matter of academic discussion as this historical subgenre had still not crystallised into

[36] Gilmour mentions two early examples of the twenty-century return to the Victorian period: Michael Sadler's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) and Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953). However, he asserts that the starting point of the fascination with the nineteenth century in literature starts in the 1960s with Rhys and Fowles ("Using the Victorians" 189).

a separate field of research as it has today. Kirchknopf considers the set of prefixes and suffixes that are used to finally settle for the term pseudo-Victorian fiction herself arguing, "it is precisely its postmodern rewrite that take an active part in the deconstruction of the Victorian novel" (8). However, as I will argue later, neo-Victorianism has by now moved on from postmodernism and Kirchknopf focuses, to a great extent, on postmodern features in her argument.

Cora Kaplan draws on Brian Moore's *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975) to describe what she refers to as Victoriana – "the modern obsession with Victorian things . . . [and] the late twentieth-century desire to know and to 'own' the Victorian past through its remains: the physical and written forms that are in its material history" (1). Kaplan expands this term to her analysis of the contemporary engagements with the Victorians in novels, bio-fiction, film and criticism. However, I find that Victoriana is a term that dominantly pays heed to the Victorian period as opposed to contemporary inquiries into the past for revisionary projects. Shuttleworth stresses how contemporary discourses are interwoven in what she refers to as retro-Victorian works of fiction claiming, "novels [that] generally display an informed post-modern self-consciousness in their interrogation of the relationship between fiction and history" ("Natural History" 253). Similarly, Sadoff and Kucich propose the term post-Victorian for literature "that conveys the paradoxes of historical continuity and disruption . . . [and] seek[s] to create self-awareness in the present by reworking the past" (xiii). These critics concur in their focus on the continuity and direct link to the Victorian period. As this genre grew into a separate field and crystallised into a discipline in its own full right as it has today, the ample choice of labels coexisted. Marie-Lousie Kohlke, the founding editor of the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, determined it as pseudo-Victorian in her early articles, to finally end up favouring neo-Victorianism herself.

The proliferation of labels highlights that we are dealing with a relatively new field of study which is still discussed and debated both "as a term . . . and as a critical interface between the present and past" (Kohlke, "Introduction" 1). Contrary to what the prefix post- indicates, I want to suggest that the neo-Victorian novel is not a continuation of a former movement, nor a trend that goes back to something previous as the term retro- suggests. Neo-Victorian fiction re-imagines, re-writes, re-cycles and revises the Victorian past both thematically and formally.

By now, scholars agree on the use of neo-Victorian to describe the contemporary engagement of the past, notwithstanding, neo-Victorianism as a term still adjoined by other definitions. Whereas Kirchknof still insist on using the term pseudo-Victorian,[37] other critics use more than one label and tend to use neo-Victorianism as an umbrella term, which is flanked by other denominations as a means to single out the differences between the different ramifications of narrative modes. Kate Flint generally speaks about neo-Victorian literature and distinguishes so-called faux-Victorian novels from the rest. Taking Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) as examples, she argues that "'faux' Victorian fiction [refers to] novels written in the Victorian tradition that refuse to self-reflexively mark their difference from it in the characteristic mode of historiographic metafiction . . . these novels revive Victorian novelistic tradition" (Flint 10). Even though there are off-shoots within neo-Victorianism, I find it more confusing than clarifying to mix different terms since attempts to use these definitions for the genre at whole have been made. Moreover, neo-Victorianism consists of a whole set of ramifications and characteristics, and consequently a novel may fit one, a couple, or several features that distinguish them as neo-Victorian. Concurring with the mainstream

[37] Kirchknopf still resists using the term neo-Victorianism and have changed from pseudo-Victorian to post-Victorian. In her paper "Dickens and His *Great Expectations* in Post-Victorian Fiction", which was delivered at the International Conference "The Other Dickens" held at the University of Portsmouth 6-8 July 2012, the scholar used the term post-Victorian for the intertextual traces of Victorian novels in contemporary fiction (n. pag.).

of scholars, I will use the term neo-Victorian myself for the return of the Victorian period in contemporary literature.

For the last two decades a critical concern to delineate neo-Victorian sub-genre have resulted in several attempts to single out a coherent framework for the manifold branches that stem from a common interest in the Victorian era. Gilmour maps out the most frequent uses of the Victorian past in contemporary literature: historical novel told from a modern perspective in modern language, pastiche and parody, ventriloquism, the inversion of Victorian ideology, subversion of Victorian literary forms, modern reworkings of Victorian classics, and finally, the research novel ("Using the Victorians" 190). Gilmour's categories are all contemporary explorations into the foundations of the Victorian novel, and I wish to highlight that neo-Victorian literature retrieves both a literary and historical period and must therefore be approached as a genre that is concerned with recreating a historical past as well as its literature.

As the name of the genre indicates, neo-Victorianism has its foothold in the Victorian era and its engagement with this particular historical and literary period separates it from other historical fiction. Heilmann and Llewellyn affirm in their study of post-millennium neo-Victorianism that what singles this genre out in comparison to other historical fiction is its self-reflexive engagement with a particular era, namely the Victorian period (4). Kate Mitchell contends that neo-Victorian writings are memory texts that pinpoint the constitutive nature of memory as collective and central to the social shaping of historical imaginary arguing that "these fictions are less concerned with making sense of the Victorian past, than offering it as a cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood" (7). Mitchell's remark stresses how we retrieve the Victorian past in order to make sense of the present. Moreover, she holds that the endeavour to "[position] neo-Victorian novels as acts of

memory provides a means to critically evaluate their investment in historical recollection as an act in the present; as a means to address the needs or speak to the desires of particular groups now" (4). Similarly, Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard argue that the driving force behind the twenty-first-century search for new forms, tropes and theoretical strategies is anchored in "an emerging appetite to (re)discover new forms of agency", which as a result, moves contemporary literature beyond postmodernism (2). Then, what makes neo-Victorianism different from other historical genres and how does it stand in relation to postmodernism?

Several critics that focus on neo-Victorian literature have drawn attention to the need to clarify the genre's position**.** However, rather than representing a break with postmodernism scholars as Louisa Hadley, Elizabeth Ho, Kate Mitchell and Rosario Arias recognise neo-Victorianism's indebtedness to postmodernism and favour the idea that we are witnessing a moment of transition towards something new. Hadley notices that the neo-Victorian exploration between history and fiction is inherently postmodern, and claims that "[albeit] departure from modernism postmodernism is always understood in its relation to modernism", and therefore, neo-Victorianism must be regarded in relation to its roots in postmodernism account for history and fiction (15). Similarly, Ho notices that "the study of neo-Victorianism has been dominated by its literary resonances with the formal aesthetics and political aims of postmodernism, hence its subordination to historiographic metafiction and the genre's ability to disrupt teleology and "readmit lost voices and texts" (6-7). Here, Mitchell suggests that the genre is developing into something new that stands in direct connection with memory. She argues, "neo-Victorian fiction might extend and transform [historiographic metafiction]", and points out that "[the] emergence of memory discourse in late twentieth century, and the increasing interest in non-academic forms of history" (3-4).

These scholars contend that neo-Victorianism should no longer be categorised as a subservient to historiographical metafiction as the genre is moving beyond the problematic relationship to historical veracity. Here in my opinion, Arias offers the best definition as she describes neo-Victorianism as "a move-on with a difference" ("Traces" n. pag.), and her coinage accurately describes the current state of neo-Victorianism as it stands in relation to historiographic metafiction as elaborated by Hutcheon.

Hence, rather than a break with postmodernism, neo-Victorianism recognises its roots in this literary period while it represents a new modes expression that is at odds with postmodernism. In this vein, Alexia L. Bowler and Jessica Cox put to the forefront two characteristics of neo-Victorianism that situates it in-between postmodernism and something new:

> [i]n particular, neo-Victorian adaptations have challenged Victorian constructions of empire, gender and sexuality, while the tendency of postmodern reworking challenges the ideas about textual hierarchy, legitimacy and authority. But more than this, our sustained engagement with the past signals our continuous attempts to make sense of the contemporary moment. (2)

Among the central features of neo-Victorian texts I want to emphasise its revisionary impulse and urge to reinvent the nineteenth century in order to approach the Victorians from a different viewpoint. The most noticeable way of doing so is for the author to include the perspective of previously marginalised characters and enlighten eclipsed narratives in order to give voice to the silenced. This narrative strategy underlines the inconsistency of our historical knowledge, and as Hutcheon remarks, "there can only be *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se, just others' truths*" (109). Kohlke aptly uses the metaphor "to enter history through the backdoor" to describe the revisionary projects that neo-Victorian authors embark in their inquiries

into the Victorian period as we know it from historical records and literary legacy ("Into History" 153). It is significant to consider the complex juncture between history and fiction to position neo-Victorianism apart from other historical genres. Of course, neo-Victorian literature is concerned with a specific period and culture which sets it apart from other historical sub-genres, notwithstanding, the term needs further explanation in order to describe its essence, which is complexly revisionary and highly metafictional and intertextual.

According to Heilmann and Llewellyn, who argue in the introduction to their volume *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010), the literary genre "is *more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century . . . [and] must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and revision concerning Victorians*" (4). Particularly, it is the prefix re- that encompasses the characteristic feature of neo-Victorianism—the contemporary *re*turn to the past to *re*vise, *re*imagine *re*interpretate and *re*cycle the nineteenth century for present-day concerns. Hence, in doing so, neo-Victorian literature practises a postmodern blurring of boundaries between categories such as history and fiction. As a historical genre, neo-Victorianism adapts a postmodern rejection of objective historicity, questioning the truth claim of official history. However, whilst neo-Victorian fiction denies fixed and homogeneous versions of the historical past, at the same time, paradoxically, it offers a revised version of history in fictional form, and in doing so plays with the reader's expectations of attaining the truth. Hence, in doing so, neo-Victorian literature engages with postmodern theories of the blurring of boundaries between categories such as history and fiction simultaneously as it reiterates Victorian narrative techniques and modes that postmodern authors rejected.

Sarah Gamble was the first critic to assert that neo-Victorianism is a performative literary mode which potential emerges in "the self-conscious exercise in looking backwards", something she labels as "a double act of recollection—that, is, the recollection of the *historical* past within a narrative framework that itself reconstitutes traces of a specifically *literary* past" (128). She claims that our backward gaze towards the Victorian period is inflected with a sense of detachment as "the neo-Victorian novel may . . . animate the past, but can only do so from the perspective of the present", and this, I add, points at the artificiality of the text and invites for an interpretation of its authenticity and our own implication of re-constructing the Victorian period. Following the lines of Jonathan Loesberg who coined the term "binocular narratives" for our awareness of holding a contemporary perspective, Gamble suggests that "[n]eo-Victorian text foreground this disjunction between past and present through the use of self-conscious or post-modern narrative devices such as intrusive authorial voice . . . or the insertion of the nineteenth-century narrative within a twentieth-century frame" (128; original emphasis). Similarly, Llewellyn notices that neo-Victorianism in twenty-first century "plac[es] the emphasis on reading and interpretation", and argues that,

> [t]his strand locates its experience and development of neo-Victorian literary techniques within an increased emphasis on the contemporary author and reader, and the pseudo-Victorian realist narrator and reader embodied through the text itself. At the core of this construction is often the issue of a cross-gendered voice and its impact on questions of authority, authenticity and authorship. (Llewellyn, "Authenticity, Authority and the Author" 186)

Although Llewellyn does not mention performativity, his argument testifies to the performative features of the neo-Victorian mode as he stresses the relationship between

the author, reader and narrator. I want to propose that the neo-Victorian performative mode is anchored in the theatricality of the text itself.

In his study of theatricality in the nineteenth-century English novel Joseph Litvak claims that the theatricality of the text is directly linked with the reading practice as an act of interpretation (xiii-xiv). Thus, in the same vein as Gamble and Llewellyn, Litvak highlights the act of reading the novel is a performative practice. Thereby, I want to suggest that neo-Victorian performativity is also theatrical. Yet, this theatricality should not be confused with theatre, and here I concur with Litvak who explains:

> theatricality . . . signifies not a single unitary style or content, but a set of shifting, contradictory energies. Unlike 'theatre,' which may denote fixed place, institution, or art form, 'theatricality' resists such circumscription, owing its value as a critical term to this very open-endedness. (xii)

Hence, whenever I refer to the theatricality of the neo-Victorian text I do so in the context of the narrative as a textual performance that engages the reader in an interpretative act that relies on the concept of the reader-as-observer. As established by now, neo-Victorianism is a highly performative literary mode, and for this reason I wish to single out three of its main tenets that support the notion of the theatricality of the textual performance that I find so characteristic of the neo-Victorian novel: firstly, it is self-consciously self-reflexive and self-reflective, secondly, it is densely visual, and thirdly, it consists in an act of (re)voicing. I will subsequently regard how these features yield contemporary authors a literary space to explore gender issues.

Firstly, Neo-Victorian revisionary enterprises of retrieving the past to scrutinise the Victorians by inferring contemporary values onto the past are deeply inflected with self-conscious self-reflexivity. Bowler and Cox argue that

> the appeal of a genre such as neo-Victorian literature . . . extends beyond a nostalgic yearning for a previous age and past aesthetic forms. Instead the attraction roots itself in self-conscious engagement with the processes of adaptation and appropriation themselves. (3-4)

Similarly, Heilmann and Llewellyn contend that neo-Victorian metafictional mode is necessarily informed by a self-analytical drive (5). We cannot approach the Victorians as they saw themselves and the contemporary act of reading and writing the past consists in a self-conscious awareness of our appropriation of the Victorian period. Kaplan stresses how neo-Victorian readership reflects the reader's own interest in the Victorians and therefore consist in a self-conscious act of reading (53). Writing alike represents a self-conscious appropriation of the Victorian period. As the opening lines in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) make clear from start:

> Watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them. This city I am bringing you to is vast and intricate, and you have not been here before. You may imagine, from other stories you've read, that you know it well, but those stories flattered you, welcoming you as a friend, treating you as if you belonged to another time and place altogether. (4)

These opening lines illustrate how the novel is a self-conscious act of recollection of a historical and literary past. Moreover, it reflects on the text's own artificiality and engages the reader in a narrative game of historical knowingness of the period (Heilmann and Llewellyn 14–15). The reader's willingness to participate in the game reveals his or her own interest in the Victorian period and predisposition to take part in the recreation of an illusionary world of the Victorian era.

Indeed, neo-Victorianism is the repetition of both a historical and a literary period and our collective memory of the Victorians is enshrined in both categories. The

self-conscious act of looking backwards is a twofold process in which we make sense about the present by looking at the past and thus represents a self-reflective stance. As Gilmour stresses, the self-reflectiveness of neo-Victorian texts harbours "something more self-conscious than the straightforward historical novel with a period setting; rather, the kind of work which is inward with the period and the conventions of literature, and draws on the meaning of which these have come to have for us today" ("Using the Victorians" 189). As explained before, neo-Victorian literature readdresses contemporary issues in Victorian period drawing a connection between the past and the present, by considering the past from a modern perspective and exploring political agendas and issues by relocating debates in the Victorian era. Hutcheon argues that "post-modern intertextuality pretends to close the gap between the past and present of the reader to rewrite the past in a new context" (118). Yet, I contend that rather than closing a gap or diminishing a space between the Victorians and us, the neo-Victorian inquiry into the past gestures towards an opening up of a space that provides room for social comment and criticism of both past and present concerns and in doing so invites us to a dialogue with the past, or as Arias and Pulham term it "a channel of communication" (xxv).

Secondly, several scholars acknowledge the predominance of the sense of sight in neo-Victorian novels, and I will determine neo-Victorian literature as a densely visual mode. Heilmann, Loesberg, Arias and Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss have regarded its optic features in terms of reader experience, (re)visualisation and materialisation of the past. Visual modes of communication convey thoughts and ideas through the sense of sight, and this I argue, applies to neo-Victorian literature as well. I find Julie Merritt's term "spectorial texts" fitting for neo-Victorian texts as authors draw on visual features and strategies, which make us visualise and re-visualise both the Victorians and

ourselves (9). Even though, Merritt uses the term to describe the visual/linguistic stance of writing and observing and its implied power structures I will expand her coinage onto the idea of the reader-as-observer that I find so central to neo-Victorianism.

Its revisionary impulse of staging the Victorians from a new and more holistic perspective is highly self-reflective. As Heilmann and Llewellyn contend "neo-Victorian literature sets up a mirror-like or reflective stance between our own period and that of the nineteenth century" (144). In this sense, we ought to ask ourselves, who is the object of scrutiny? Are we observing them or do we project our own concerns onto the Victorians? This takes me back to the notion of conveying messages through sight, and in this context neo-Victorianism as a visual mode consists in self-conscious, self-reflective and subjective experience. Arias stresses how the phenomenological perspective is binocular referring to the way we see the Victorians from a contemporary standpoint, which consequently nurtures a communication between the past and the present ("Traces" n. pag.).[38]

Arias approaches the neo-Victorian reader experience through the lens of phenomenology and contends that the neo-Victorian appeal to the senses is a way of turning the past into an embodied and tangible experience in the present. Arias states:

> [p]henomenology, as a philosophical method proves to be central to the neo-Victorian phenomenon since the phenomenological perspective allows for the incorporation of a look that re-reads and re-examines the perceived world, while simultaneously being part of it. This involves the embodied activity of a reader who is both subject and object, spectator and part of the spectacle. ("Neo-Victorian Fiction and the Senses" n. pag.)

[38]Similarly Arias and Patricia Pulham address neo-Victorian literature as a dual channel of communication between the past and present as it looks backwards to explore uncharted territories in contemporary fiction. See the introduction to *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010).

Arias adopts the philosophical theory of phenomenology as a critical tool to examine visual encounters that interlocks the past with the present, and is a timely approach as other critics emphasise the relevance of vision. In the introduction to the special issue "Spectacle and Things: Visual and Material Culture and/in Neo-Victorianism" in *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Boehm-Schnitcker and Gruss pay heed to how the conjunction between the visual and the material will sharpen analytical tools. One of their main claims is that neo-Victorian literature arises "questions concerning how artworks perspectivise and emplot the past, how they recreate the period's materiality, or how the position the reader in order to re-visualise the Victorian era" (Boehm-Schnitcker and Gruss 2).

Taken this, I find a strong connection between the performative mode and the spectorial narrative as it establishes a theatrical relationship between the text and the reader. The reader-as-observer derives pleasure from the texts as if enjoying a performance, and subsequently, this has stimulated a critical response among scholars who aim to decode the visual structure of the narrative by reading different modes of watching and their implied power dynamics into the texts. Heilmann and Llewellyn rightfully assert that one of the side-effects of re-enacting the past is that we simultaneously recreate visual regimes of objectification and commodification and thus, revise the characters within the framework of scopophilia and the appropriatory gaze (114). In the same terms, Kohlke remarks that neo-Victorianism represents "a significant mode of imagining sexuality in our hedonistic, consumerist, sex-surfeited age" ("Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 67). This visual characteristic pinpoints the contemporary voyeuristic interest in the Victorian era and hints at the to-be-looked-at-ness of the neo-Victorian subject. The conjunction of performativity and visual features

in the text presents a fruitful space of exploration for authors who wish to delve into issues of space and gender in particular.

Third, I have mentioned before that neo-Victorian novels place previously eclipsed narratives at the forefront and in doing so recover the voices of the silenced. The notion of giving voice to subjects that lack a voice of their own is necessarily linked to agency. Helen Davies utilises the trope of ventriloquism in her monograph *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (2012) to explore voice in context of social agency. From outset she makes the distinction between "recovering suppressed voices and imagining lost voices" clear and she stresses the tensions between voice/agency in the process of "re-voicing" (7). Neo-Victorianism has from its earliest origins been compared to an act of ventriloquism (Byatt's *Possession* is often given as an example) as novelists give voice to the Victorians by articulating their thoughts, concerns and standpoints from a perspective that infers contemporary value onto the past. However, I suggest that voice is tied in agency to more or less extent depending on the point of view that the author adopts. The point I wish to make is that the instance that voice and vision converge in neo-Victorian text, the reader-as-observer is engaged in an interpretative encounter in which characters assert subjective identities through the author's deployment of the inherent power structures of different modes of watching. By engaging with the underlying dynamics of the theatricality of the text characters assert agency as the narrator manipulates the reader in performing the text almost as if it were a spectacle.

Rina Kim applies the notion of performativity onto the recreation of narrative voices in literature emphasising that the strategy of applying cross-gendered literary voices, i.e. when authors adopt the voice of a distinct gender than their own, "unsettles ideas of stability and coherence that underpin social and sexual norm and challenges the

very notion of *a* (that is singular) gender identity" (3). Llewellyn maintains that this is a frequently used strategy in neo-Victorian novels and he holds that

> [c]ross-gendered voice in neo-Victorian fiction also seeks to reclaim a gendered experience of historicity in ways that play with identity politics of authorial control. Much of this strand of neo-Victorian writing has sought to re-imagine female experience of gender identity and sexuality in the nineteenth century . . . (Llewellyn, "Authenticity, Authority and the Author" 186)

The performative mode of neo-Victorianism and the fact that it is a hybrid literary space in-between two historical periods, the Victorian period and our own, has invited for queer interpretations of this genre. Gamble suggests that the trouble of authenticity of neo-Victorianism echoes debates concerning transsexual gender identities, whereby she concludes, "novels that explicitly raise the question of gender authenticity are merely foregrounding the 'trans' identity intrinsic to *all* neo-Victorian texts" (131). Llewellyn's examination of cross-gendered literary voices in neo-Victorianism, a mode that Gamble has accentuated as performative and even comparable to transgender identity, singles out the neo-Victorian novel as a suitable genre to delve into topics regarding gender and agency.

The historical novel provides a fruitful space for women writers to explore gender and reimagine the past from a point of view that encompasses women's experience. Diane Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Woman Writers, 1900-2000* (2005) covers a wide time span in tracing the development and specific characteristics of women's historical fiction with the aim to set feminist writers explorations of this genre apart from other historical fiction. She points out "women's historical novel need to be read in relation to *women's* engagement with history and not dismissed as 'unhistorical', 'factually inaccurate' or merely 'irrelevant' according to a

male-dominated model" (Wallace 15). Neo-Victorian literature lay claim to offer a truer image of the past than so far official history does as the revisionary projects that authors embark incorporate previously excluded records by including non-normative facts, people and events, and in doing so, basically ignores taboos. Thus, neo-Victorianism as a historical genre is a literary space of social contestation of and examination of gender inequalities that have been circumscribed by heteropatriarchal history. Kohlke points out that neo-Victorianism

> [h]arks back to the nineteenth century realism but circumvents the standard in-built reticence on unpalatable and/or taboo subjects of the time, so that initially it seems to reflect Victorian reality more comprehensively and thus more authentically than 'genuine' Victorian literature, adopting what might be called *new(meta)realism* . . . presenting itself as paradoxically *more real* than the thing it imitates. (155)

Many contemporary feminist writers turn to the Victorian period to explore gender issues and this has sparked an interest in literary criticism. As a result considerate attention has been and is still directed towards gender in neo-Victorian literature. Although Wallace wishes to situate woman's historical novel as a separate genre and complains about the restricted criticism dedicated the genre, I propose that contemporary women writer's engagement with the nineteenth century, and the critical response to feminist issues within neo-Victorian studies, partly fills this gap.

Wallace notes that the present-day popularity of woman's historical writing both among the popular mainstream readers and within the academia can be traced back to the renaissance of this genre in the 1980s and its subsequent proliferation in the 1990s (180). This interest runs parallel with the development of neo-Victorianism and its evolution from a subcategory to historiographic metafiction towards establishing itself

as a separate field of study. As argued above, neo-Victorian literature is anchored in postmodern historiographic metafiction, and as Wallace notes, in the late 1980s formal experimentation of the historical fiction was marked by a ludic examination of political and moral issues to recover women's history (180). She continues describing how women writers' literary investments in history evolved the following decade asserting, "[t]he woman's historical novel of the 1990s looks less like a nostalgic retreat into the past than a complex engagement with the ways in which representations of history change over time in their relation to structures of power, not least those of gender" (Wallace 204).

Several critics have addressed the present-day tendency of looking backwards in literature with nostalgia. In a neo-Victorian context, Christian Gutleben has elaborated arguments in favour of nostalgia in *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001). He labels this fictionalised interest as nostalgic post-modernism pointing at how "contemporary fiction advocates social, sexual, and sometimes aesthetic advancement, and yet to do so appropriates, reverts to build on models of the past" (Gutleben 10). I admit that nostalgia is one of the characteristic of neo-Victorianism and, as noted above, Gilmour asserts pastiche as one of the main strands in neo-Victorian literature. Nevertheless, Gutleben's argument is limited to a nostalgic "revival of a bygone time" (193), and I suggest that neo-Victorian nostalgia is imbedded in the contemporary interest in literary aesthetics and not a yearning for a time when things were better, and certainly not for women. Feminist historical fiction is highly politicised and critical towards gender inequalities in the past, hence, I find feminist uses of neo-Victorian literature to be memory texts instead nostalgic instances concurring with Gayle Greene who compares nostalgia to memory in her article "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory" (1991). The critic claims that

"'nostalgia' is the desire to return home, 'to remember' is 'to bring to mind' or 'think again,' 'to be mindful of,' 'to recollect'" (Greene 297), and in this vein, neo-Victorian literature is an act of remembrance.

Significantly, Greene warrants that "[historiographical metafiction] is a powerful tool of feminist critique, for to draw attention to the structures of fiction is also to draw attention to the conventionality of the codes that govern human behaviour" (293). Her emphasis on feminist critique directed towards structures and conventions invites for a discussion of topics related to space and gender regarded as socially constructed categories that have been subjected to heteropatriarchal norms throughout history, and still are in many ways depending on the culture you live in. Greene asserts that women's historical fiction is memory texts as,

> [m]emory revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own. Far from being a trustworthy transcriber of 'reality,' it is a shaper and shape shifter that takes liberties with the past as artful and lying as any taken creative writer. (294)

The quote accurately describes neo-Victorianism and the way contemporary writers appropriates the Victorian era, playing upon the idea of offering a truer, more holistic account of the past than official history. Therefore, I suggest that neo-Victorian literature written by feminist writers is also historical fiction that reassesses gender issues are memory texts. As mentioned earlier, Mitchell defies the idea that neo-Victorianism is an attempt to make sense of the nineteenth-century, and I wish to add, that it is rather a question of making sense of the present and to use memories of the past to foreground changes in the future.

While feminist explorations of historiographic metafiction were closely linked to the effort in reclaiming women's presence in and contribution to history by turning patriarchal history into *her*story, later feminist experimentation of historical genre are more overtly political as they push for different feminist agendas. In this vein, I wish to emphasise that neo-Victorian revisionary projects delve deeper than a superficial retrieval of previously forgotten ignored or overlooked accounts and persons. As I have argued above, neo-Victorianism a performative literary mode consolidates self-conscious self-reflectiveness, visual structures, voice and agency and proves an apt genre to explore gender issues. Bringing these tenets together, women writers who resort to neo-Victorianism are provided with possibility to examine ideologically-inflected issues regarding gender in relation to subjective selfhood in the past and present.

This performativity is indebted to being a hybrid space in-between the past and the present, what Eckart Voigts-Virchow refers to as "an area of tension between the Victorian and the contemporary, a hybrid space of mimicry, camouflage and assertions of difference" (112). Its in-between nature gives room for a negotiation of past and present issues and the chance to imagine new accounts of a past historic as well as reimagine ourselves in comparison to the Victorians. Previously marginalised female characters take the centre stage in neo-Victorian novels and persons from the lowest layer of the social stratum of the Victorian class system as working-class women, domestic service and prostitutes are turned into protagonists to explore gender issues. A socially stigmatised figure as the prostitute is a popular character in neo-Victorianism and, and as Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, ironically claims on her blog The Little Professor, "[t]here must be at least one prostitute, who will be an alcoholic and/or have a heart of gold. If the novel is *about* a prostitute, however, she will have at least one

unusual talent not related to her line of work" (n. pag.). The prostitute is a figure who has a marked presence in neo-Victorian novels and I wish to emphasise that when turned into protagonists of their stories, they are characterised by first fulfilling the myth of the harlot's progress to subsequently invert their downfall into disgrace by turning into social climbers and assert an identity outside their trade. This points at that prostitution is a transitory process, as I have detailed in section 3.1.3., and the neo-Victorian prostitute manages to tackle her horrific experience and often prosper in new social roles. I have previously described the prostitute as a liminal public figure who straddles contrary states of exploitation and independence in the same section, and in this vein neo-Victorian literature allows the Victorian prostitute more physical and social mobility than she was granted in the nineteenth century.

Michel Faber's *Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and Linda Holeman's *The Linnet Bird* (2004) depict women who have been introduced to sex trade as children by parents,[39] worked as prostitutes but always with the aim in mind to rise above their trade. As Burstein has noted, the neo-Victorian prostitute does have a heart of gold and her possession of some particular talent helps her to find an escape form her trade. Another recognisable feature is that the prostitute is keen on taking charge of her own destiny, and consequently, a running theme of these novels is the act of writing. While Sugar in *The Crimson Petal and the White* is writing a novel herself in which she vents out her anger for the sexual degradation she suffers from, Linny Gow, alias the Linnet Bird, settles down to write her story of her life at a mature age. Remarkably, both prostitutes are literate and talented storytellers.

Emma Donoghue's short story "Onward" (2012) is based on the true account of the London prostitute Caroline Thompson who managed to start life anew for together

[39] Neo-Victorian prostitutes are often traumatically introduced into sex trade by their parents or caretakers as children which echoes W. T. Stead's exposé of child prostitution in London published as *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (1885).

with her brother and illicit daughter with the help of Charles Dickens and his Urania project to reform prostitutes. Jenny Hartley demonstrates that Caroline's brother, Frederick Maynard, contacted Dickens with the hope of helping his sister out of prostitution, and subsequently notes that Dickens was awed by the profound respect that Mr Maynard expressed for his sister (166). A meeting between Dickens and Caroline was arranged and the novelist was so astonished by her story that he got personally involved in setting up a new life for her. Her story, which affected Dickens so profoundly, is surrounded by secrecy and mystery, and as Hartley remarks,

> [s]o much time and effort for one case. Equally striking is Dickens's notion of Caroline, from the first mention of her, as story. 'The astonishing story' is how she first appears to him, albeit one he will never be able to use in fiction. Caroline herself does it too, in a letter to Dickens about 'my Story' with a capital S. (167)[40]

Donoghue's account of Caroline equally focuses on storytelling and when Frederick presents the possibility to change her life if she tells her story to a charity man (Dickens is not mentioned by name) she only agrees on doing so if she is in charge of her own story: "Sell her story instead of her body? . . . I'll do it,' opening her eyes blindly and taking the pen from his hand" ("Onward" 38). However, the narrative ends with these words indicating that Caroline takes charge of her own life story and holds the power to pass it on or not.

Similarly, Linda Holeman's novel *The Linnet Bird* offers a first person account about the life story of a prostitute turned respectable colonial wife in the early Victorian period. Although, "Onwards" is told by a third person omniscient narrator, these texts

[40] Dickens was first acquainted with Caroline in 1854, and was starting *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) the following year. Hartley recognises some similarities between Amy Dorrit, the prostitute in Dickens's novel, and Caroline Thompson in their physical description and both were good housekeepers who educated their siblings with patience (167).

concur in putting emphasis on the prostitute's voice and agency, as well as offering a human depiction of women who have been forced into sex trade. Burstein remarks that Holeman's novel is flawed in several aspects, the plot is uneven and the protagonist too free-thinking and self-congratulating, but admits that "[f]rom an academic's point of view, however, *The Linnet Bird* offers an unintentional window onto the current state of 'popular' thought about nineteenth-century culture—in particular, as women experienced it" ("Prostitute's Progress" n. pag.). Whereas in Victorian culture the harlot's progress refers to a woman's downward journey into prostitution, in the neo-Victorian novel the prostitute's progress is upward and the heroine takes charge of her own destiny which always has a positive outcome. Burstien criticises *The Linnet Bird* for the change of course in the protagonist's life as "[i]n an odd twist of psychological development, the novel somehow translates Linny's years of sexual abuse into moral 'liberation'" ("Prostitute's Progress" n. pag.). Moreover, neo-Victorian novels that centre on prostituted characters always include an instance of redressing where the prostitute triumphs over her perpetrator, or is granted recognition for the wrongdoings committed towards her.

Nevertheless, scholars as Loesberg and Kohlke have questioned the underlying reasons behind the popularity of themes such as prostitution and sexuality in neo-Victorian fiction and drawn attention to the voyeuristic implication in engaging with the sexual underworld of the Victorian era. As detailed earlier, Heilmann and Llewellyn have examined novelistic uses of scopophilia and voyeuristic objectification in novels such as Barbara Chase-Riboud's *The Hottentot Venus* (2003) and *The Observations* (2006) by Jane Harris in relation to the reader perspective. Loesberg concentrates on the "afterlife of Victorian sexuality" in neo-Victorian novels and asserts that "Victorian sexual repressiveness . . . plays such a large role in our understanding of their culture"

that contemporary undertakings of Victorian sexuality "ensnares us in a project that shares a profound common ground with Victorian repression: to find a truth about sexuality" (361-62). Equally, Kohlke parallels our fascination with Victorian Orientalism—"the availability of unexplored geographical 'dark areas' for reconfiguration into mirrors of our own desires, a displacement occurs from the spatial to the temporal axis" ("Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 12). What the critics hint at is the reader's own voyeuristic implication in the exploration of the sexual underworld of Victorian society, as I will prove later in my analysis of Faber's novel. As mentioned in section 2.2.2., Marcus's study of nineteenth-century erotic sub-cultures and the widespread phenomenon of pornographic literature has shed light over a previous ignored aspects of the Victorians and opened up a new aspect of Victorian culture to explore by authors, which has indeed haunted the imagination of most authors who turn to the nineteenth century. Thus, I would suggest that the interest in the figure of the prostitute goes beyond the humanist drive to treat sexually exploited women as individuals, and as Kohlke contends,

> neo-Victorian fiction's project of the retrospective sexual liberation of the nineteenth century becomes disturbingly infused with the preferred ignorance – or deliberate denial – of our own culture's complicity in free market systems that enable continuing sexual exploitation and oppression. ("Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 3)

The interrogation of the veracity claim that upholds the notion of official history that is at core of postmodern historiographic metafiction has propelled an endeavour to retrieve hidden accounts of queer people in historiography and subsequently in literature.[41] Neo-Victorian revisionary mode and the possibilities to circumvent

[41] Today critics often use LGTQ as an umbrella term for studies of Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Queer identities while others use the label HLBTQ, which distinguish between homosexuality and

Victorian taboos to give voice to the silenced give contemporary authors the chance to explore queer identities in the past as well as to comment on the present. Vicinus stresses how lesbianism in the past was circumscribed by an eloquent silence rather than absense ("Lesbian Perversity" 70). However, the prevailing silence in the past has led to an exclusion of queer accounts from official history, and lesbian memory is a central topic in neo-Victorian fiction concerned with gender. The popularity of Sarah Waters's trilogy among mainstream readership and the critical attention devoted to her work has situated her as a canonical writer within neo-Victorianism. Waters's neo-Victorian novels hinge on present-day consciousness of the prolonged silence of queer history and the concern to fill this lacuna in historiography. Paulina Palmer remarks that Waters's lesbian reading and writing practices are central themes in her work ("Fiction of Sarah Waters" 69), and the novelist skilfully recovers lesbian history by reimagining same-sex relationships between women in the Victorian period. Waters is renowned for queering Victorian subgenres, and her novels about lesbian heroines, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, have been labelled as lesbian sensation fiction, while *Tipping the Velvet* is recognised as a queer *Bildungsroman.* These novels are self-consciously metafictional, as described by Heilmann and Llewellyn, as Waters writes lesbianism into the Victorian canon where it was previously omitted. In this vein, Palmer asserts that "the acts of reading and writing in which [Waters's] female characters engage mirror, in metafictional fashion, the kind of activities that she herself performs" ("Fiction of Sarah Waters" 70).

As a historical genre, neo-Victorian reworkings of the past imply a revision of history itself, and consequently, the practice of queering the past in literature takes stronghold in lesbians' reclaim to a history of their own. Lillian Faderman's seminal

bisexuality as well. Since I am exclusively concerned with lesbian identities and desire in neo-Victorian literature I will limit my argument using the terms lesbian and queer. I will use the term queer whenever I speak about non-heterosexual identities, lesbianism included and therefore use the label queer together with lesbian to describe same-sex relationships between women.

study of same-sex relationship between women *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981) opened up the door for lesbian inquiries into the past. Faderman's survey of romantic attachments between women in the Victorian period pinpoints that it was an era when relationships between women were condoned rather than rejected by society, and she argues:

> romantic friendships were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital, since women for centuries other than ours often internalized the view of females as having little sexual passion. Thus they might kiss, fondle each other, sleep together, utter expressions of overwhelming love and promises of faithfulness, and yet see their passions as nothing more as effusions of the spirit. (16)

Faderman describes how romantic relationships between women in the nineteenth century were common, acknowledged and overseen by society, and although not necessarily homoerotic, there was room for lesbian relationships in the past. Authors of historical fiction who aim to explore lesbian identities find neo-Victorianism an especially interesting historical genre, as romantic relationships between women were central to Victorian culture.

Emma Donoghue, the author of *The Sealed Letter* (2009),[42] contends that what she finds particularly fascinating about writing about lesbianism in the past is the lack of terminology and vocabulary to describe lesbian identities (qtd. in O'Neill 4). The title of her novel stands as a metaphor for how testimonies of lesbian affection were hushed

[42] For a thorough analysis of neo-Victorian representations of lesbian lack of voice see my article "'Not the Kind of Thing Anyone Wants to Spell Out:' Lesbian Silence in Emma Donoghue's Neo-Victorian Representation of the Codrington Divorce", in which I explore lesbian identity and space in the *The Sealed Letter*. I examine lesbian silence and presence in the public sphere drawing on contemporary criticism of Jürgen Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere as a democratic and inclusive space and Lillian Faderman's work on lesbian history.

down in the past and excluded from historical records. Heilmann and Llewellyn point out that "Victorian sexuality and the way we re-imagine it, its contradictions, excesses, dissimilarities from or correspondence with our diversity of experience holds an irresistible appeal for the neo-Victorian imagination" (107). Thus, the author is making a metafictional reference to the narrative itself as artificial and plays with our desire as contemporary readers to discover the Victorians' secrets that have been, echoing Donoghue's words, "sealed up" for more than a century (*The Sealed Letter* 316). She holds that "lesbian history has often been impoverished by rigid divisions between friendship and sex, social acceptability and deviance, innocence and experience" (*Passions* 1). In her study of lesbianism in eighteenth-century literature she notices that, on the one hand, lesbianism was not as silent and invisible as previously believed, and on the other hand, it was not as tolerated as has been claimed (*Passions* 7). The history of lesbianism is ambiguous and the lack of terminology to describe homoerotic bonds between women in the past offers an opportunity as well as posing a challenge for contemporary authors who wish to address lesbian topics. The Victorian era is of special interest to lesbian writers of historical fiction because, while in the past lesbianism had been described in terms of relationships, this was the time when the consciousness of lesbian identity emerged.

Donoghue singles out four general topics that are central to lesbian culture: gender blurring, friendship, sex and community (*Inseparable* 11), and here neo-Victorian novels about lesbianism such as Waters's *Tipping the Velvet, Affinity* and *Fingersmith* or Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* explore issues that fall within this categorisation.[43] Thus, the neo-Victorian mode serves as a vehicle to explore lesbian

[43] Although not concerned with lesbian identity I find two novels that are worth mentioning as they depict the lives of cross-dressing characters. Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (1999) fictionalises the life of the Victorian medical doctor James Miranda Barry who was discovered to be a woman after death. The novel has been reissued under the title *The Doctor: A Novel* in 2002. Similarly,

identity in the past as well as pushing for contemporary queer agendas. Wallace argues that lesbian historical fiction approaches the past from a point of view that articulates the interest and desire of contemporary feminists and thereby runs the risk of not representing the past in a way that coincides with circumstances of these women in relation to the historical context of the novel (177). However, lesbian neo-Victorian fiction is highly self-reflective as authors pay heed to the injustices committed towards lesbian women in the past, which gestures towards a desire to fill pools of silence as well as promoting acceptance and equality for queer identities then and now.

The array of novels that are set within performative spaces as the music-hall, the circus and the freak show that have been published since the mid 1990s has situated the world of spectacle as a separate ramification within neo-Victorian literature. Angela Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984) is one of the earliest examples of neo-Victorian fiction and its uses of multiple settings of different performative spaces has paved the way for other authors to follow. *Nights at the Circus* develops within the world of spectacle at the turn of the nineteenth century and the heroine passes through theatrical spaces as the music-hall stage, freak show exhibition and the circus ring. Carter skilfully combines feminist politics and magic realism to retrieve *her*story, and is later followed by Sarah Waters who turns to the Victorian music hall in *Tipping the Velvet* in order to give voice to lesbian characters. Waters states in an interview ". . . when I'm looking to the past, for example, I'm looking for sites of interest or possibility around sexuality or around gender, and thinking about how class impacts on that" (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 43). As discussed in chapter 3.2.2., popular entertainment spaces were anchored in a working-class culture and served as a vehicle of social

Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* (2006) narrates the story of a boy who was raised as a girl and lived all his life as a woman. The most recent novel about cross-dressing characters is Neil McKenna's *Fanny and Estella: The Young Men who Shocked Victorian England* (2013). He is also the author of the biography *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (2003), a person who has been fictionalised sedulously in contemporary literature as well due to his sexuality.

expression that circumvented bourgeois codes of propriety and respectability. Therefore, I propose that the Victorian world of spectacle is a setting that is peculiarly amenable to female expression for authors who are concerned with gender issues, an idea I will develop below.[44]

The proliferation of novels that explore Victorian entertainment spaces represents a marked trend in neo-Victorian literature in the twenty-first century. At least eighteen novels, to my knowledge, have been published about Victorian popular entertainment, and only four of them before the turn of the twentieth century.[45] To mention a few, Barbara Chase-Riboud's *The Hottentot Venus* (2003) Susan Barrett's *The Inconstant Husband* (2006), Barbara Ewing's *The Circus of Ghosts* (2011), Essie Fox's *The Somnambulist* (2011), and the two most recent being Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013) and Kate Griffin's *Kitty Peck and the Music Hall Murders* (2013). A noteworthy fact is that a vast majority of these novels, fifteen out of eighteen to be precise, have been written by women. This, I argue, is not a coincidence as women writers of historical fiction that turn to Victorian entertainment spaces set out to destabilise gender conventions that fall under heteronormative categories and stereotypes. Different stage settings are used to subvert gendered and spatial restraints to negotiate subjectivity and assert agency, and as Allison Neal remarks, "the stage allows for experiments in the portrayals of class, race, and particularly gender, to be attempted, undermined, responded to, and, above all, disseminated throughout the wider

[44] Other novels that turn to the world of spectacle are Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998) and Tracy Chevalier's *Burning Bright* (2007). Both are set in eighteenth-century London and engage with the freak show and the circus, respectively. However, I focus on the Victorian world of spectacle and popular entertainment culture examining how contemporary authors use these leisure spaces for revisionary projects of past and present gender issues.

[45] Apart from novels, Steven Millhauser's short story "Eisenheim the Illusionist" (1990) and Emma Donoghue's play *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1998) fall into the category of neo-Victorian world of spectacle. Also worth mentioning is Dennis Hamley's short story for children, *Stage Struck* (1999), which is about a young girl's wish to become a music-hall actress in the Victorian period.

community" (55). Although the novels use different stages, the spectacle transgresses the boundaries of the stage and female performers continue their enactments off stage.

Up to the moment, the world of spectacle has not received critical attention as a separate sub-genre,[46] and one possible reason is that it is a new subgenre that is still emerging. However, Carter's and Waters's novels have been given considerate attention and have been critically acclaimed for their feminist uses of the past. Waters admits that Carter has been a major influence in her development as a writer. She shares Carter's interest in performance and late nineteenth-century London and admires her for drawing on the literary canon "to push an explicitly feminist agenda" (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 42). Carter's *Nights at the Circus* initiated the contemporary literary interest in the Victorian world of spectacle and this postmodern romp of historiographic metafiction stages a carnivalesque literary performance to reiterate *her*story, and the author playfully blurs boundaries between fact and fiction, magic and the real in the process.

Gregory J Rubinson finds Carter "the most influential figure in British women's writing since World War II " and asserts that she "self-consciously analyz[es] how gender structures social relations [and uses] fantasy to imagine worlds where androcentric and traditional gender roles have come undone" (149). Although Rubinson makes this remark in relation to her feminist rewriting and demythologisation of Western fairy tales, Carter turns to entertainment spaces to undermine patriarchal and heteronormative convention to deconstruct fixed parameters of femininity through performance. In this sense "[Carter's] purpose of [historical] revision is to find ways of

[46] Two volumes have focused exclusively on the trope of haunting: Tatiana Kontou's *Spiritualism and Women's Writing from the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (2009) and Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham's *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past* (2010). Marie-Louise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's neo-Victorian series explore different tropes and the three titles published up to the moment are *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering* (2010), *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (2011), and *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century* (2012). Helen Davies explores voice and agency utilising the trope of ventriloquism in her recent book *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (2012).

speaking to new realities in society. Portraying new social values about gender, then, requires new representational conventions" (Rubinson 150). Carter has found a suitable space in the Victorian world of spectacle to explore gender as socially constructed, and in particular to deconstruct the image of the female body as a spectacle for the male gaze. Her use of entertainment spaces in conjunction with the performative literary mode of neo-Victorianism has opened up for other authors to employ new feminist uses of the past. The neo-Victorian performative mode informed by self-reflectiveness, visual dynamics and the potential to articulate silenced voices yields the Victorian world of spectacle an ideal site to examine the spatialising of gendered identities and female subjectivity.

Different strands can be noticed within the literature of the world of spectacle, however, rather than being separate categories, they are interconnected and often overlap. Generally, performative spaces are used to debase heteropatriarchal values about gender roles and to question gender in conjunction with other socially constructed categories as race and class. On the one hand, the use of entertainment spaces is mostly motivated by the drive to articulate ideological values in line with feminist and queer politics, and subsequently, this often engages with feminist theories that focus on the spectacle of the female body and femininity. On the other hand, a number of novels fall under the subgenre of crime and detection as well. Notwithstanding, these novels also destabilise fixed gender identities, as, for example, Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) and Ann Featherstone's *Walking in Pimlico* (2009), which have cross-dressing protagonists.

As discussed previously in chapter 3**,** the public/private dichotomy was porous and socially inscribed gender roles were contested and subverted on the stage. I have argued in section 3.2.1. that the emerging feminist consciousness came to the forefront

in female performances, and this is an idea that Waters favours. She claims, "[gender is] always in process, . . . not fixed . . . and how we feel about women changes all the time, and how we feel about sex and sexuality and class . . . historical fiction can dramatically enact that" (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 48). Waters's three neo-Victorian novels are all performative in some sense, yet as Cheryl A Wilson notices, Waters extends the connection between performance and constructions of femininity to the music hall in *Tipping the Velvet* "to [open] up additional space for inquiries concerning gender roles, class and sexuality" (286). Preceded by Carter's feminist revision of history and celebratory attitude in her carnivalesque deconstruction of patriarchal history (Kohlke, "Into History" 155), Waters secures a foothold for lesbianism in the Victorian era. Feminist and queer reimaginations of history were main concerns for Carter and Waters, who also invoked the notion of femininity as performance and the spectacle of the female body for the male gaze.

Authors today focus instead on spatial hierarchies, power structures of different modes of watching to explore subjective indentity and agency. Gender as performance is a recurrent topic and Butler's theories on gender performance are still fashionable and deployed by novelists. Palmer was the first to emphasise the relevance of gender performance as elaborated by Butler in the article "Gender as Performance in the Fiction of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood" (1997). She stresses that gender performance "has the effect of deconstructing hetero-patriarchal gender roles and identities, thus exposing their very constructedness", and then argues that the theatrical enactment of gender identities "mobilizes and parodies the images of womanhood available in nineteenth-century culture" ("Gender as Performance" 26, 31). Similarly, Mary Russo claims that such enactments "expan[d] the spatial dimension of female specularity" (139). I suggest that neo-Victorian uses of the backdrop of entertainment

spaces converge the tenets stated above: self-conscious reflectiveness, visual and voice to explore agency and female subjectivity. The power structures of spectacle and the visual interplay between the performer and audience run parallel to the relationship between the narrator and the reader-as-observer. The performative mode retracts the power dynamics displayed in the novel in the act of writing and reading.

Neo-Victorian novels that stage gender issues engages with performative strategies to envision the Victorian past from a modern perspective that warrants previously marginalised characters with voice and agency. In this chapter I have discussed how contemporary authors turn to the neo-Victorian performative mode to address gender issues highlighting the self-conscious self-reflexivity and self-reflective enterprise this constitutes together with vision and voice. I want to suggest that novels that intertwine topics of gender with these three tenets of the neo-Victorian performative mode are pressing beyond the strife to rewrite history from a feminist perspective. I will refer to these novels as "novels of spectacle" as the term spectacle implies performance, entertainment, vision and something that attracts attention. According to Merriam-Websters's dictionary, spectacle is "[s]omething exhibited to view as unusual, notable or entertaining; *especially*: an eye-catching or dramatic public display" (n. pag.). The definition of spectacle as offered by Merriam-Webster suits the conceptualisation of a female vision of the city in the neo-Victorian novel and the notion of woman as spectacle both within and outside the world of spectacle.

London figures prominently as a setting in neo-Victorian fiction of spectacle and it engages with Victorian literary representations of the capital that render the city in terms of a visual pleasure, and as Nead stresses, "the distinctive feature is that the city is written and consumed as visual spectacle" (57). As argued before, neo-Victorian fiction is a repetition of a literary and historical past, and the tendency of using London as

setting evokes three notions: the Victorian London of Dickens, the modern metropolis and the capital of the empire that favoured progress simultaneously as it meant regress.

Contemporary readers often evoke Dickens's London when thinking about the nineteenth-century, and furthermore, the vast majority is familiar with his portrayal of the capital in novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1837-37) or *Great Expectations* (1860-61) which are still widely read and have been adapted for the screen several times. London is central to the fiction of Sarah Waters, as Ciocia asserts, "the backdrop of the Victorian capital ha[s] become a trademark of her fiction" ("Queer and Verdant" n. pag.). She uses it as a setting in all of her three neo-Victorian novels,[47] and her third novel *Fingersmith* (2002) has an overt connection to Dickens's London.[48] Ina Bergman and Norbert Lennartz notice that "Dickens's novels do have submerged layers of meaning that alert us to the fact that Dickens not so much affirms as dismantles Victorian discourses" (216). In this vein, Anne Wille argues that Dickens's domestic ideal was often represented as repressive and dysfunctional and the author's engagement with the concept of separate spheres was considerably ambiguous (295). Moreover, as discussed in section 2.2.1. Dickens's London was exceedingly theatrical and visual, and as a result, the legacy of Dickens's London has inspired contemporary authors to represent the capital in ways that evoke Dickens's London in order to bestow their novels, with a Victorian accuracy, theatricality and spectacle. The point I wish to make here is that Dickens's settled a basis of literary representation of London that is employed by authors who turn to the neo-Victorian mode for two reasons; firstly to

[47] Sarah Waters has also used London as setting in *The Night Watch* (2006) which is set in the 1940s. In her fifth novel *The Little Stranger* (2009) she uses a rural backdrop to the narrative, however, in her upcoming novel *The Paying Guest*, which will be published in Autumn 2014 by Virago she returns to London, this time set in the 1920s. For further details, visit Sarah Waters's official webpage at http://www.sarahwaters.com/books/ and Virago's homepage at http://www.virago.co.uk/new-sarah-waters-novel-for-autumn-2014/.

[48] For analysis of Waters's engagement with Dickens's literary representation of London see Anna Wille's "A Queer Twist to the Tale? Sarah Waters's and Stephen Fry's Reworkings of Dickens in *Fingersmith* and *The Liar*."

reconstruct Victorian urban scene as a theatrical stage set and invoke the image of the city as spectacle, and secondly, to make new uses of the Victorian cityscape and as a result offer new readings of subjective spatiality. Thereby, the urban context represents a prolific setting for critical readings of space and gender.

In neo-Victorian fiction, the city is used as backdrop to explore subjective responses to the city as well as the process of spatialising identities. Silvia Mergenthal remarks how the representation of city in literature mirrors the social position of urban citizens and the interest in individual response to the city has taken new forms in the late twentieth-century:

> Starting with Lefebvre's 1974 *The Production of Space*, the so-called "New Geographers" challenge positivist notions of space as neutral, passive geometry, and instead stress interaction and exchange, thus exposing space as a site if complex, social, historical and economic struggles; the site requires individual mapping. (131-32)

She goes further on to argue that in postmodern fiction, there are no spatial references that correspond to a true or singular meaning, as there is no true reading of the urban landscape:

> characters walking, for instance, the streets of London, invoke a host of competing spatialities, and add to their number themselves . . . in these novels some spatialities are privileged over others, and which patterns of power and domination, or inclusion or exclusion, are cloaked in the language of spatial distribution. (Mergenthal 133)

Even though the critic does not mention it herself, she is clearly describing the spatialising of identities and how the individual contextualise selfhood in the city, which is rather socially produced than depicted as a topographical area.

Her viewpoint is clearly postmodern though, and the critic proposes that the city in literature presents an urban environment where "anything goes" and "the concept of the outsider becomes, ultimately, meaningless" (133). In contrast, Sizemore affirms, "contemporary women urban novelists [do] not view London as having achieved a feminist or egalitarian society, but [do] portray London as being open for women's perception of it . . . as having a place for women" (5). Neo-Victorian novelistic explorations into urban spaces answer to Sizemore's argument as contemporary authors retrieve the Victorian period to evaluate both past and present gender issues and establish a parallel between them and us. As will be explored in chapter 5, present-day authors refashion contemporary gender debates in Victorian guise, as well as use the nineteenth-century to push feminist and queer agendas, which is the case of Angela Carter and Sarah Waters. As I have suggested above, the sphere of entertainment poses a prolific setting to subvert and negotiate gender issues.

Novels that focus on women working within the world of spectacle are novels of spectacle in a two-fold sense as both theme and mode are performative. Notwithstanding, I wish to emphasise that novels of spectacle are not limited to works that evolve within entertainment spaces, but conversely, they include narratives that apply the trope of theatricality to explore women's urban experience in the nineteenth century. I have examined in previous chapters how Victorian women circumvented spatial restraints imposed by the public/private ideology by taking an active participation in the public spaces, both on and off the stage. In section 3.1., I have argued that women who moved in the streets perceived the public sphere as a social space of spectacle. Here, I have examined how women moving within the public sphere were in a vulnerable position because, on the one hand, they were a visible presence that stood out from the rest of the crowd, and on the other hand, they disrupted the gendered

norm of domesticity. In order to achieve freedom of mobility within the public sphere, the women were obliged to adopt certain strategies to avoid gendered restraints and this is my focus in analysis of *The Crimson Petal and the White* (in 5.3.). Hence, novels of spectacle involve performativity and visual entertainment, and albeit my main focus is on the world of spectacle, the label also applies to other novels that share the same features.

5. Neo-Victorian Novels and the Victorian Public versus Private Dichotomy

This chapter explores the centrality of the public/private dichotomy in four neo-Victorian novels and undertakes the examination of the social construction of space and gender to find out how these categories interlock in the spatialising of identity. The nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres entailed an "imposed segregation of genders" that limited woman to the private realm (Kohlke and Gutleben 3). Consequently, her social role was bound to the ideal of domesticity, yet, as Shuttleworth notices: "[t]he two seemingly opposed models of womanhood constructed in nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology – refined angel, or helpless prey to the workings of the body" were far from representative of Victorian womanhood at large ("Ideologies" 32). Conversely, the public/private dichotomy was constantly being challenged and subverted as women used different strategies to appropriate a female space within the public sphere. On the one hand, I have provided an overview of women's marginal social status in the Victorian period in section 2.2.2., and, on the other hand, I have challenged the division of gendered spheres in chapter 3 in a discussion of different female urban figures who managed to manoeuvre spatial restrictions. Neo-Victorianism challenges official history by speaking from the margins, shifting focus from exclusion to exclusion, and thus, represents alternative configurations of space and gender.

My main aim is to demonstrate how female urban figures manage to destabilise the public/private dichotomy and appropriate a female space in the public sphere. The authors utilise the concept of the city as stage and the idea of life as a theatre, however, these novels are not limited to the master trope of *Theatrum Mundi*. On the contrary, all engage with contemporary theories on performativity to some extent and the heroines adapt different strategies to turn the city into a stage. I will examine how the different

female figures discussed in chapter 3 are characterised in the novels and analyse spatial identities in their subjective response to the city.

The four novels under consideration in chapter 5 are Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013) and they will be examined separately in chronological order. The connections between Carter, Waters and Garland are several; they are women writers who turn to the Victorian world of spectacle to consider feminist issues both in the past and the present. Moreover, all three are highly performative and densely visual. So is *The Crimson Petal and the White*, yet, Faber's novel does not evolve within entertainment spaces as the others. Notwithstanding, Faber employs the trope of theatricality in his description of Victorian London and the prostitute Sugar's ascendance on the social ladder. In doing so he hinges on the inherent performativity of London as described in section 2.2.1., to reproduce the city as spectacle. This is a key issue in the ensued analysis, and I will focus on the social production of space and spatialising of identities in the afore-mentioned novels.

The choice of these four novels has been taken for more reasons that those stated above. Firstly, *Nights at the Circus* is a precursor of the neo-Victorian mode, and moreover, the first novel within the ramification of the world of spectacle of this historical subgenre. Secondly, Waters is a canonical author within neo-Victorianism and her works have been significant for the widespread interest in the field. Similarly, Faber's novel has turned into a canonical text within neo-Victorianism, albeit it is his only neo-Victorian novel. The popularity of his book and its characters among the readers led him to publish a collection of short stories about the characters from *The Crimson Petal and the White.* Finally, Garland's novel is the most recent novel that is

set within Victorian entertainment spaces and in this regard the analysis includes representative works of what I have referred to as "novels of spectacle" in the previous chapter.

Angela Carter (1940-1992), has been recognised as the most influential woman writer in Britain since World War II (Rubinson 149). Her novel *Nights at the Circus* had a major impact on the British literary canon and paved the way for other writers to rely on the nineteenth century in their writing. She was a prolific author and published fourteen novels, several radio plays, and screen plays and she wrote and edited several collections of short stories. Carter relied heavily upon the literary canon and popular culture which she, according to Sarah Waters, plundered promiscuously (Introduction xi). Also, Carter is well known for her revision of fairytales and her feminist re-writing of them in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Her novels remain in print and the prevailing popularity of her work still increases: in 2006 she was more celebrated than ever (Stoddart, *Angela* xi). Her writing can be defined as "rewriting androcentric, and socially conservative male-authored texts from a feminist viewpoint" (Rubinson 149). Carter's novels *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), just to mention a few, examine gender issues and deal with both masculinity and femininity. The historical setting of *Nights at the Circus* provides Carter a ground to reconsider gender and push for a feminist agenda. In the Introduction to the Virago 2006 edition of *Nights at the Circus*, Sarah Waters compares Carter's theatrical and fabular style with the magic realism of Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez, but points out that Carter writing is commitedly feminist and the author is specifically concerned with issues regarding sexuality, gender and class (Introduction vi). Carter has been a major influence for Sarah Waters and inspired her to write neo-Victorian novels.

Sarah Waters (b 1966) is according to Alex Pryce "one of the most widely read writers of her generation" and he points out that her name has become synonymous with the best of historical fiction in contemporary literature (n. pag.). Waters has at the moment published five novels, three of which have been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize: *Fingersmith* (2002), *Nightwatch* (2006) and *The Little Stranger* (2009). Her prize-winning novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) is the first of three books set in nineteenth-century London. With *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith*, *Tipping the Velvet* completes Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy (although not a sequel), which deals with same-sex relationships in the Victorian period. The author gained her interest in nineteenth-century London when she wrote her PhD on queer historical literature (Pryce n. pag.). Waters herself attributes the success of her novels to Angela Carter and the writer reassures that she would not have been able to write her novels without reading Carter's work (Waters, Introduction xi). In an interview Waters expresses that she admires Carter especially for how she uses and revises the literary canon to push for an explicitly feminist agenda (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 42). At the moment when Waters was writing *Tipping the Velvet* Peter Ackroyd published *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994). She admits that she felt quite nervous about it as the novels share the common themes of the nineteenth-century London music-hall and the Victorian underworld. However, as Waters herself states, the novels differ and the music-hall setting in late-Victorian London offers immense possibilities (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 46).

Michel Faber (b 1967) is a Dutch novelist and short-story writer, yet he writes in English and is currently living in Scotland. His bestseller *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) has turned into a canonical text within neo-Victorian studies, and adapted for the screen in a BBC miniseries in 2011. Yet it is up to the moment, the only one to

be set in the nineteenth century. Faber has been praised for his prose style and acclaimed for his novel *Under the Skin* (2000), a macabre story about a woman who picks up hitchhikers on the Scottish Highlands told from the point of view of the female protagonist. Jules Smith finds Faber: "an undeniably clever and manipulative writer, continually seeking to direct (and unsettle) the reader with a hint here and an odd phrase there. He is also skilled in creating a cast of characters and orchestrating them, unfolding plots to gradually reveal clues and details" (Smith n. pag.). Faber himself admits that Kurt Vonnegut has influenced him "thematically and in terms of authorial brio" ("Michel Faber" n. pag.), albeit this may filter through his writing this does not apply for *The Crimson Petal and the White* which rather evokes Charles Dickens's description of London.

Rosie Garland (b n.d.)[49] is an English writer and performer from London. She is known on the stage as a vocalist in the post-gothic punk band The March Violets and her cabaret performances as the vampire queen Rosie Lugosie, a character Garland proclaims to be her alter ego ("Rosie Garland" n. pag.). Off-stage, she is a writer and has published short stories and poetry, nevertheless, her role as a performing artist is closely connected to her writing and reflected in her style. Her debut novel *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013) has been well received by reviewers and both awarded and shortlisted for several prizes.[50]According to the book cover, *The Palace of Curiosities* has been described as "a jewel-box of a novel, with page after page, scene after scene, layer after layer of treats and surprises. Garland is a real literary talent: definitely an author to watch" by Sarah Waters (n. pag.). While her use of magic realism and the

[49] The PhD candidate has contacted Rosie Garland and been granted an interview with the author in Malaga in January 2014. Garland's birth date is missing and the author seems unwilling to reveal her age.

[50] *The Palace of Curiosities* won the Mslexia prize in 2011, an award for debuting women writers and, in 2013 it has been nominated for the LGBT Award "Loved by You" in the category of the best novel of the year. For more information, visit Rosie Garland's official webpage.

visual features situates her close to Angela Carter, Garland's concern for gender performance is closer to Sarah Waters.

5.1. Neo-Victorian Entertainment Spaces in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984)

Nights at the Circus is a referential text within neo-Victorianism as it is often cited as one of the precursors to the neo-Victorian genre alongside Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). Furthermore, Carter's novel has received considerate critical attention; Alison Lee approaches the novel as an example of historiographic metafiction that critically reassesses history to examine events that have been effaced from but may have contributed to history and thus hovers between fact and fiction (103), Paulina Palmer reads Judith Butler's theory of gender performance into the narrative exploring "the contradictions inherent in the concept of the performer both on stage and off" ("Gender as Performance" 28), Mary Russo focuses on womanhood as spectacle and women as producers of spectacle (141), Sara Martín Alegre is concerned with female monstrosity and the grotesque. All of them make reference to the Bakthinian concept of carnivalesque at some point and pay heed to the artificiality of history and/or gender, yet none of the critics recognise *Nights at the Circus* as a neo-Victorian novel, which in my opinion is clear.

Nights at the Circus has not been examined as a neo-Victorian novel until the twenty-first century. Kohlke, Gamble and Davies have analysed the narrative in a neo-Victorian context. However, this new approach has by no means replaced the postmodern perspective on the novel, on the contrary, it has rather added an additional viewpoint. I wish to emphasise that Helen Stoddart's rigorous case study entitled *Angela Carter's* Nights at the Circus (2007) does not make any reference to neo-Victorianism. Interestingly, Kohlke was the first scholar to pay heed to *Nights at the*

Circus in the context of neo-Victorianism in her article "Into History through the Back Door: The 'Past Historic' in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affintiy*" (2004), yet, she does use the label neo-Victorian to describe it. However, she clearly situates the novel as an example of what scholars today acknowledge as neo-Victorianism stressing its intensely self-reflexive mode, revisionary impulse and concern for "metaphorically give voice to the historically silenced and forgotten who *have no history*" ("Into History" 154). Gamble was the first scholar to examine *Nights at the Circus* labelling it as neo-Victorian focusing on the in-betweenness of Carter's novel concerning gender identity, space and history, and what is more, she proposes that it "helped to fuel the neo-Victorian phenomenon in literature" (132). Davies follows the lead of Kohlke in placing emphasis on voice: *Nights at the Circus* is "[a] narrative[e] of ventriloquism, both in terms of metatextual engagements with the politics of 'talking back' to the gendered inequalities of the nineteenth century and in relation to specific thematic issues surrounding voice, gender, agency and desire" (69). These four topics are at the heart of *Nights at the Circus* and are evinced in its performative theme, structure and mode. The novel has played a crucial role in the development of neo-Victorianism and opened up the sphere of the Victorian world of spectacle as an ideal setting to explore issues regarding space and gender, as I subsequently hope to demonstrate in my analyses of *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013).

Even though Carter's novel has been approached from different angles, I consider that its meaning has not been exhausted. The current interest in the world of spectacle in neo-Victorianism points towards a revived interest in *Nights at the Circus* as it is not only a forerunner to the literary mode but a precursor to the ramification of neo-Victorian novels set within entertainment spaces. It is my aim to take on from these critics as they highlight the centrality of space and gender in a neo-Victorian context

and my objective is to look into how Carter uses socially constructed categories as space and gender and for what purpose. The ensued analysis adds a perspective to previous work by casting it in the light of the spatialising of identities through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial theory and feminist revisions of the public/private dichotomy. Furthermore, I will situate the narrative in relation to the contemporary interest in Victorian popular culture and concern to recognise the world of spectacle as a vehicle of cultural expression and social contestation.

Nights at the Circus begins backstage at a music hall in Victorian London in medias res, describing an interview between the winged aerialist Sophie Fevvers and the American journalist Jack Walser. Her ambiguous identity is sustained by illusion and Carter evokes mythology and fairy tale elements in the characterisation of Fevvers. Reminiscent of Leda and the Swan, the music-hall diva claims to have been hatched from an egg and insists on the authenticity of her wings. The off-stage performance that opens the novel sets the performative tone that imbues the narrative, and as Sarah Waters remarks, Carter uses a theatrical style to push a "distinctly feminist agenda, determined to debunk cultural fantasies around sexuality, gender and class" (Introduction vi). My aim is to examine how gender intertwines with space through acts of performance on and off stage and how Carter employs theatricality to subvert patriarchal images of femininity. In addition, the reader is placed in the position of an observer and her slogan "Is she fact or is she fiction?" lures not only Walser, but the reader too, into a narrative game about its veracity. In this vein, Russo contends that "Fevvers controls the gaze of the spectators, but also that of the reader. She is a consummate storyteller, when she tells her own story, she manipulates both the reader and her material for maximum effect" (94). Therefore, *Night at the Circus* is arguably a novel of spectacle and I will examine how Fevvers spatialises her identity through on-

stage enactments and off-stage performances by taking a closer look on how she destabilises the public/private dichotomy while she asserts agency in the public sphere. I will focus on how she alters the underlying power structures of different modes of watching and assumes control over her audience by maintaining the illusion of her identity intact off stage.

The novel is structured in three volumes that are set in three different geographical areas – London, St Petersburg and Siberia – yet, they also correspond to the different stages in Fevvers's career, and my analysis will follow the tripartite arrangement of the novel. The first volume depicts her past from being brought up in a brothel to working as a freak-show exhibit. The second part sets off from her present role as a music-hall performer in London towards St Petersburg as a circus star in Colonel Kearney's circus. Finally, she ends up on the Siberian tundra remote from theatrical environment. Throughout the novel different male characters attempt to define her identity according to patriarchal-invested images of womanhood, and as Russo proposes: "Fevvers is the figure of ultimate spectacularity, a compendium of accumulated cultural clichés, worn and soiled from circulation. Yet, poised as she is on the threshold of a new century, her marvellous anatomy seems to offer endless possibility for change" (141). As we will see, her need to tell her own story faces obstacles in the male characters Walser, Christian Rosencreutz and the Gran Duke, who all try to determine her according to male-defined views of women, and in this regard, *Nights at the Circus* is the story about Fevvers's struggle to assert her own subjective femininity outside a patriarchal framework symbolically ending at the doorstep of the new century—"the New Age in which no women will be bound to the ground" (Carter 25).

Walser will be Fevvers's principal audience in the narrative, and, although the journalist is "determined to manipulate Fevvers's story of her life to serve his own agenda" (Davies 70), the heroine takes charge of her own story as the plot unfolds and, thus, claims her own voice and agency. Walser's main purpose is to reveal Fevvers's identity as a winged woman to be a hoax. He is convinced that he will break the illusion of Fevvers as a bird woman, and in order to do so he decides to follow her when she joins a circus tour heading for St Petersburg. While he attempts to dismantle Fevvers's identity, he falls in love with the circus star and instead gets more and more entangled in her story and, with it, the world of spectacle too.

The historical context of the turn of the nineteenth century is significant for the novel's feminist politics. In section 2.2.2. I have described women's social position in the Victorian period and described that change was continuous but slow. Women had few legal rights in the beginning of the nineteenth century and limited possibilities due to the restraints of patriarchal society. Aidan Day notices that Carter engages with the feminist politics of the nineteenth century as it was the dawning of women's consciousness of equality which would pave the way for the women's movement in the twentieth century. He remarks that Fevvers spells out the significance of symbols of self-determination and freedom which still were unknown for nineteenth-century women, and further deconstructs these symbols of male dominance to remove women's individuality (177-78). Stoddart adds that this also "sets up a distinctly feminist critique of masculinist idealization of women" and further argues that "the nature of this critique is not determined by the historical period to which it refers; in fact, what makes the novel radical is its contemporary voice and insight" (*Angela* 58).[51]

[51] Stoddart suggest that Carter alludes to Margaret Thatcher's return to Victorian values as self-restraint and discipline in order to eradicate the sexual liberalism of the 1960s (*Angela* 11).

Volume one concentrates on Fevvers's past and reveals her background from early childhood in Ma Nelson's brothel to her stint as a human exhibit in Madame Schreck's Museum of Female Monsters. It is noteworthy that Carter departs from two exploitative spaces that aimed at sexual and corporeal abuse based on gender difference. As Fielder notes, the official history of freaks has "always been circulated by their exhibitors, but these are invariably ghost-written, a part of the act rather than seeing beyond it" (274). In a true neo-Victorian fashion, Fevvers takes control of her own life story and in a performative mode she ensnares Walser (and the reader) into a narrative game that hinges on the playfulness of the metafictional mode of neo-Victorianism and as the narrator emphasises: "Fevvers, the most famous *aerialiste* [sic] of the day; her slogan, 'Is she fact or is she fiction?' And she didn't let you forget it for a minute" (Carter 3). By claiming her own voice to turn history into *her*story she shifts from a peripheral position to the centre stage and manages to subvert patriarchal constraints. Her voice is interspersed with other voices, as for example Walser's and Lizzie's, which Linden Peach identifies as a carnivalesque impulse: "all express different attitudes and ideologies so that, typical of the carnivalseque, the novel appears to proclaim the relativity to everything" (qtd. in Stoddart, *Angela* 49). Although the novel features carnivalesque characteristics, following the lines of Kohlke, I prefer to read the novel as a neo-Victorian stance of revoicing and reimagination of the past, which in turn approaches contemporary issues in nineteenth-century disguise.

Carter subverts the view of the brothel as a space of sexual exploitation of women, to instead turn it into a proto-feminist sisterhood, or as Jeanette Baxter suggests, the author represents "the whorehouse as a site of female agency and autonomy" (101). Fevvers's function is to entertain the guests displayed as a tableau vivant in the entrance. As a performer in Ma Nelson's brothel, she impersonates

mythological figures such as Cupid or the Winged Victory, and the fact that she impersonates both male and female characters highlights gender as fluid and performative. In contrast to the Victorian drawing-room recital, which was aimed at attracting suitable husbands who could ensure financial security through marriage (C A Wilson 285-86), Fevvers subverts the ideal of the angel in the house as she is displayed as symbols of triumph. Thus, her wings represent the interruption of patriarchal restrictions on women. Instead of exhibiting her female accomplishments to attract a husband, Fevvers exposes her wings as a symbol of triumph and strength as a New Woman.

Fevvers joins Madame Schreck's freak show of her own free will to be part of her museum of female monsters. Martín proposes that Fevvers takes charge of the male interpretation of female monstrosity (Martín 195). Indeed, it can be interpreted as a way of being in control of the interpretation of her body in contrast to the brothel. Nevertheless, Fevvers's decision to become a freak performer invokes Gerber's critique of Bogdan's work on the nineteenth-century freak show. As discussed in chapter 3.2.2., the idea of the freak show as a chance for disabled people to pursue commercial and artistic success is problematic as this undeniably consisted in an exploitative practice of exhibiting physically divergent people for profit, mainly through a dehumanising spectacle. Because of this, Gerber challenges the consent and volition of the freak performer (39-40). In Madame Schreck's exhibition of female freakish corporeality, women whose bodies diverge from the normal are showcased in a cellar to the male gaze. The women are represented according to mythological symbols and fairytale conventions whereby their performance becomes a stylised presentation. Thus, the freak show provides a space where gender performance can be staged as "performance of a stylized representation" (Bogdan, "The Social Construction of Freaks" 35). Shirley

Peterson highlights how "the illusion of 'otherness' commonly links freaks to women within the 'us' of patriarchal culture" (291). I suggest that the female freak becomes the ultimate Other as both femininity and freakishness are conditioned by cultural frames of mind and are conceived as freakish through stylised repetitions of acts. Madame Schreck makes a spectacle out of female corporeal digressions and makes women stage their bodies for male spectators: "Shall I open the curtain? Who knows what spectacle of the freakish and unnatural lies behind it!" (Carter 69). In the freak show women are abjected by exposing their female bodies as grotesque.

Lee remarks that Fevvers's physical aspect makes some people see her as nothing more than a freak in spite of her star status (103). Whereas during the circus act the focus is on her performatory skills, in the freak show the attention is drawn to Fevvers's body. In Sara Martín's words, female freaks are seen as "grotesque monsters both because of their formidable bodies and singular bodies", and she further argues that it is not their abnormal bodies that turn them into monsters, but whether they belong to the side of the abused or the abusers (194). In the lines of de Beauvoir's thoughts, woman has under the patriarchal gaze been abjected by man as the Other throughout history, and been subjected to male power. Martín argues that women who differ from the average are special not due to their deviation from normality but because they limit the power exerted over them and take control over their own lives (194). Fevvers takes advantage of her in-between status to destabilise power relations that situate woman in the inferior position, however, before learning how to do so she must face her abusers.

In the museum of female monsters it is a woman, Madame Schreck, who extorts abusive power over other women and exploits their bodies by exhibiting their extraordinary bodies to male viewers. Here, female divergent bodies are submitted to

the male gaze and to the control of Madame Schreck, as they are cast in a highly eroticised manner. Hence, Fevvers becomes a "projection of the repressed [male] desire onto the [female] performer" (Mulvey 17). Fevvers is seen as a female monster during the time she is submitted to Madame Schreck's power and thereby abused as a freak. As a contrast, in the circus ring she is no longer considered to be a freak or a monster. Instead she is admired for her skills and her body provokes admiration and fascination.

Fevvers plays the role of an angel in Madame Schreck's Museum of Female Monsters and she reverses the Victorian concept of woman as the Angel of the House: Fevvers is all but fragile, domesticated, pious or devoted to patriarchal supremacy, conversely, on stage in the freak show, Fevvers inverts the male-scripted roles for women by posing as the protector of the Sleeping Beauty. Sarah Sceats notices how images of woman "[having] to do with objectification, infantilization (miniaturization) and the inculcation of passivity" are forced upon female freaks (87). Equipped with a sword, a phallic symbol of power, Fevvers watches over the passive and vulnerable Sleeping Beauty: "Only a branched candlestick cast sombre light over Beauty sleeping on her bier and I stooping over, with my bent wings and my sword, Death the Protectress, you see" (Carter 79). By exposing her feminine body, which shows masculine traits as muscularity and strength, and by fulfilling the male role as woman's protector, Fevvers combines femininity and masculinity within the same body. In short, Fevvers enacts her gender as multiple and unfixed on stage by exposing her female yet masculine body, and, as will be discussed in my analysis of the second volume, by acting unconventionally.

Victorian freak-show exhibitions were frequently based on gender transgression, and in the novel, the female freak show represents a social space of interpretation of femininity that converge three dimensions of social space as elaborated by Lefebvre.

The freak show is a representational space in the sense that it converges spatial practice and representations of space (Lefebvre 40). Fevvers is displayed according to mythological images that enhance her oddity and along the other female freaks, her performance is based on the expected/unexpected. They are represented in stylised scripts to be "evaluated empirically" by the audience (Lefebvre 38). Thus, the visual encounter in the freak show combines perception and conception of freak identity, and is in this regard a socially produced space.

Fevvers's confrontation with Rosencreutz testifies to the difference between theatrical selfhood and gender performance. To Rosencreutz, she is "Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species" and in flesh she is "half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of opposing states through the mediation of [her] ambivalent body" (Carter 92-93). It is impossible to define Fevvers or categorise her body into one single identity. Her whole person resides in a constant performance which prevents any attempt to fix her identity or being. Rosencreutz fails to see beyond her theatrical performance and tries to determine her into a static and single identity. His intention is to destroy her ambiguity by killing her, nevertheless, Fevvers controls the situation by taking advantage of the dazzling power of the gaze and she escapes destruction.

Up to the moment, most critics have focused on the carnivalesque mode of the novel and Carter's use of performative spaces to deconstruct male-defined images of femininity. Notwithstanding, I suggest that Carter's use of performative spaces also hinges on the world of entertainment as a socially constructed space. In section 3.2.2., I have approached the circus as a social space that provided an alternative lifestyle for people who strived towards a site of fulfilment outside the constraint of ideology. Contrary to the romanticised image of running away with the circus, I have explored the

deeper meanings of the circus following the lines of Janet M Davis, Assael and Boissac, among others, to consider it as a social space in terms of Lefebvre's perceived-conceived-lived triad. Just like social space is not neutral, "the space of the ring is not purely passive. It is not neutral. It is constituted by a set of binary geometrical oppositions that play the role of spatial algorithms for the construction of significant categories of location and movement" (Bouissac 17). Hence, the circus is not conceived merely by a ring-shaped arena, the circus performer maps out the circus space according to the geometrical conditions required to carry out the enactment. Bouissac affirms that the artist masters the space manipulating virtual oppositions as inside/outside the ring, centre/periphery, diametric/circular movement horizontal/diametrical (17), and this I add, enables the artist to manipulate the audience's perception of the spectacle. In *Nights at the Circus* we will see how Fevvers engages with the Lefebvrian notion of triadic space as her performance brings together conceived and perceived circus spaces in the social production of the circus number during which the audience are drawn into a speculation on gender and veracity. As mentioned before, Bouissac holds that "the circus artist deal[s] with the continuum of the physical space with its actual distances and gravitational forces, but for the production of spectacular meanings they exploit discrete semiotic categories" (17). This describes Lefebvre's lived space where dimensions of perception and conceptions converge in the social production of space—ideas I will consider in Fevvers's performance.

In volume two, the plot returns to Fevvers's present situation as a professional performer, first a music-hall aerialist and subsequently a circus star. The exposition of her skills and her body on the music-hall stage and in the circus ring dismantles the normative expectations of male and female behaviour. Paulina Palmer highlights that Carter uses scenarios as the circus ring and other performative contexts where disguise

and masquerade are applied in order to explore the performative aspects of femininity ("Gender as Performance" 38). In *Nights at the Circus* the stage works as a scenario to explicitly enact gender performance in order to reveal the constructed dimension of gender. Carter places the spectacle in performative spaces to deconstruct gender roles as normal and natural constructs. As Assael's study of women in the Victorian circus has illustrated,

> the acrobat's success depended upon the performer's negotiating various aesthetic codes that were sometimes in conflict. The tension, for example, caused by the public's approval of her 'ladylike' athletic exhibitions, on the one hand, and the controversy surrounding her sexually provocative poses and costumes, on the other hand, made her task of aesthetic negotiation inherently problematic and complex. (126)

Carter stresses Fevvers's masculine traits: her strength and size as well as her appetite and lack of decorum. Her ambiguity does not only rely on whether she is fact or fiction, but Carter also comments on her ambiguous gender as she reveals feminine and masculine characteristics. Simultaneously as "she set[s] the hairs in perfect order", Walser feels confused by her unfeminine behaviour: "she yawned with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark . . . then she stretched herself suddenly and hugely, extending every muscle as a cat does, until she seemed to fill up all the mirror, all the room" (Carter 57). Walser's exaggerated description of her stressing her features in animalistic terms points towards her freakish character, an idea I will return to later, but it also testifies to the view that correct gendered behaviour is socially perceived and not natural.

The author's approach to gender and identity as constructed out of textual, historical and performative forces in *Nights at the Circus* anticipates the ideas of Judith

Butler. Consequently, as Sarah Sceats emphasises, Carter is a prescient author who engages to a remarkable degree with contemporary theories (84-86). In the same way as Butler rejects the idea of dual sexual categories based on heterosexual views, Carter defies a binary gender frame and places Fevvers inbetween masculinity and femininity. Fevvers's in-between status is highlighted in her slogan "is she fact or is she fiction?", and by the spectators' uncertainty whether she is a man or a woman (Carter 3).

Lee notices that the speculations about Fevvers's wings attract all attention to her body, and as mentioned earlier Walser's aim is to expose her as a fake (99). Fevvers's performance continues after the show as she transfers the spectacle off stage to preserve her role as the winged woman. She puts on a spectacle that impedes Walser from defining her in other ways than through her performance. By playing her role off stage, Fevvers makes it impossible to define her according to the normative gender roles. Her masculine body and unfeminine behaviour make the viewer doubt over her sex. Although she seems to have more male traits than female ones, yet, Fevvers's femininity is still dominant. By being in charge of her own production on and off stage, Fevvers denies her audience to define her. Sceats argues that "it is as though performance itself, the relationship with an audience, imbues [Fevvers] with a special identity" (93). In other words, Fevvers acquires her gender identity according to Butlerian notions of performativity. Thus, by continuing to act off stage, the theatrical performance turns into a stylised repetition of social acts which emphasises gender as a social construct.

Voice is equally important to the construction of gendered identity in *Nights at the Circus* and voice, vision and agency converge in Fevvers's performance as artist on stage as well as narrator. Davies highlights how Fevvers's voice challenges masculine textual authority, and what is more, "the representation of her extraordinary voice is

apparently shackled to essentialist fears and fantasies about the connection between women's sexuality, voices and the body" (71-72). In this vein, Carter uses magic realism to subvert the patriarchal discourse of femininity. Baxter remarks that Fevvers's fragmentary account "forms a radical postmodern pastiche that disturbs readerly expectations and undermines notions of textual authority and authenticity" (97). Nevertheless, I would argue that Carter applies a metafictional playfulness, which is an inherent characteristic to the neo-Victorian literary mode, in order to push questions of authority and authenticity, as well as issues concerning gender identity and social roles to the forefront.

As a female aerialist Fevvers exposes her strong and athletic body which makes the audience doubt over her sex. Mary Russo points out that the male viewers' inquiry over the female aerialist performers' sex is a fact that figures in historical records (144). Actually, Joe Lambert, the circus Strong Man, made his debut in the circus ring as a female trapeze artist and impersonated a woman until he was discovered at the age of twenty (Ackroyd, *Dressing Up* 86). Likewise, female artists like Zaeo caused uncertainty among the audience due to her strong athletic body.[52] I think that this historical fact hints at the Victorians' awareness of gender as performative. Therefore, I want to relate Fevvers's ambiguous appearance to theories of gender performance as Butler insists on the unfixed and transferable status of gender. As mentioned in section 3.2.2., Bouissac approaches the circus as a social space where social categories are manipulated in the same way as in everyday life, only that the circus renders them more visible due to its performative nature (20). Hence, the circus act reveals Fevvers's fluid and transferable gender identity, which in turn pinpoints the performativity of gender,

[52] As argued in 3.2.2. Assael's study of Zaeo's career testifies to this. See Zaeo's carte de visite in the appendix, plate 3.

i.e. a stylised repetition of social acts that are separable from the biological sex of the subject.

In the music hall and the circus ring, Fevvers performs a daring aerialist number in public which requires strength and courage—characteristics which are normally attributed to masculinity. Fevvers's ambiguous and fluid gender identity is emphasised in her act as an aerialist, and as Russo observes, the aerialist's number is an act of negotiation since the performer is temporarily suspended in the air in-between two stations (150). Hence, Fevvers's role as an aerialist reflects the fluid status of her gender identity and her position in-between male and female. On the one hand, she conceives the circus ring as a space of social transgression as she maps out her spectacle according to the laws of physics and geometry to create illusion of being a flying woman. In doing so she achieves to destabilise the public/private dichotomy as she appropriates a female space in the public sphere. On the other hand, the audience perceptions of her semi-nude spectacle raise questions regarding her respectability. Assael gives insight into how "women on top" epitomised Victorian social concern regarding sex, femininity and respectability (108), and furthermore emphasises how female artists situated themselves in a publicly visible situation where they displayed their semi-nude bodies that according to bourgeois notions of sexuality straddled release and suppression (119).

Moreover, Fevvers is perceived as being "enigmatic regarding gender" (Russo 146), and in this vein Fevvers's act highlights the performativity of gender and reinforces her multiple gender identity:

> God she looked *huge*. Her crimson, purple wings in flight, obscured by the rood tree of the Imperial Circus. Yet those marmoreal, immense arms and legs of hers, as they made leisurely, swimming movements through the air, looked palely unconvincing, as if arbitrarily attached to the bird attire. Walser, drawn to

> the ring like a moth to a flame, thought, as he had before: 'She looks wonderful, but she doesn't look *right*.' Yet he could not put his finger on what was wrong, could not identify in quite what way the proportions seemed distorted . . . Was the trouble this: there was an air about her that suggested, whilst convincing others, she herself remained unconvinced about the precise nature of her own illusion. (Carter 185)

As stated before, Fevvers's audience sees her image as odd and finds it hard to define her sex, and this is noted in the quote above. Due to the difficulty of categorising her into the normative representations of woman, doubts arise whether she is a man or a woman. Moreover, I suggest that her enactment once again becomes a reversal of the Angel in the House as she swings above the audience exhibiting her body equipped with wings, and fits Assael's image of "woman on top" (108).

Carter highlights this in the episodes where men try to objectify Fevvers and determine her into one single identity. Lee notes that Rosencreutz and the Grand Duke both try to fix Fevvers into a single and static identity but fail to do so because they confuse the performance with the performer (100). This is where the difference between theatrical enactments and gender performance resides. Butler sees gender as the result of performative acts, which undermines the concept of gender as an expression of a pre-existing self (Jagger 23). Rosencreutz and the Grand Duke misinterpret Fevvers's performance as the enactment of a pre-determined gender core and consequently they attempt to define her according to binary gender. Instead, Fevvers's spectacle creates the illusion of an inner gender identity which is fluid, multiple, transferable and changing. Therefore, it is impossible to define Fevvers into one single identity.

The sexual innuendo behind Rosencreutz's and the Grand Duke's attempts to possess Fevvers's body hinges on the prejudice of the sexual availability of female

performers. As I have discussed in section 3.2.2., the idea that the actress was considered as a prostitute in Victorian society was not as widespread as previously believed, or as Davis claims, it is an "exorbitant generalisation" (T C Davis 100). I have argued that the strict codes of respectability and rigid sexual mores were upper- and middle-class concepts, they did not apply for all levels of the social strata. On the one hand, the actress was cast in the light of prostitution as she was a public woman who exchanged entertainment for money and often offered a titillating spectacle. On the other hand, she was admired for her skills and talent, and not necessarily perceived as a loose woman, especially not among the working classes. In *Nights at the Circus* we have the two opposing views on the female professional performer. Whereas Walser is infatuated with Fevvers, Rosencreutz and the Gran Duke represent the upper classes and their view of Fevvers is clearly sexually attenuated as both attempt to buy her. Moreover, their view of her is reflected in their mode of watching as the gaze at her with the objectifying male gaze, and Carter clearly interlocks the characters Rosencreutz and the Gran Duke with Mulvey's conceptualisation of the male gaze. I have previously explained that Mulvey's argument in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has subsequently been supplemented with the idea of the female spectator. However, to-be-looked-at-ness is still a relevant theory as it represents the masculinised gaze that takes visual possession of the female body. Importantly, one mode of watching does not replace the other, and Carter incorporates the two visual postures into the narrative.

Mulvey considers psychoanalytic theories drawing on Sigmund Freud's scopophilia and Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage.[53] Her concept of "*to-be-looked-at-ness*"

[53] Freud and Lacan have been criticized by feminist thinkers for defining woman in relation to man. Mulvey identifies this as phallocentrism, and emphasises that woman is defined according to what she lacks in comparison to man (14). She explains how Freud's notion of scopophilia, the pleasure in looking, is linked to observation of other people as objects and subjecting them to the control of the gaze.

to portray the sexual imbalance between the female object and male observer (Mulvey 19), is reflected in the novel as Fevvers constantly under pressure of being subjected to male gaze and consequently its power. Stoddart draws on Mulvey's paper as she notes that Carter explores "the power relations involved in constructing female bodies as a commercial spectacle" (26). Fevvers subverts the power relations of woman as subjected to male control by utilising the power of the gaze in her spectacle. The novelist deconstructs the notion of the displayed female body as a passive entity to be scrutinised by the active male gaze. Fevvers requires the spectators to see her as an individual instead of objectifying her through the gaze. In her enactment she demands the audience's gaze: "She was twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as any object that is intended to be seen, not handled. Look! Hands off! LOOK AT ME!" (Carter 13). This illustrates Mulvey's afterthoughts on the female character as an active agent who "finds herself . . . enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides" (29). As I have argued before, Walser is Fevvers's main audience and his view of her differs from Rosencreutz's and the Grand Duke's objectifying male gaze. In contrast, Walser is subjected to the power of her gaze, which she manages to achieve by transferring the power achieved in her theatrical enactments on stage to her off-stage performances.

Furthermore, by demanding the audience to look up at her, Fevvers takes control over the gaze and inverts the power relations. Her superior position swinging in the air above the spectators confirms this and, as Russo suggests, the upward gaze becomes a

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Freud argues that the performer becomes the projection of the observer's repressed desire, and therefore, the beholder of the gaze obtains sexual pleasure from watching the objectified other in an active and controlling sense (Mulvey 16-17). Lacan's theory is based on a phase which he calls the mirror stage which is a crucial moment in a child's constitution of the ego. The child, he argues, recognises the image in the mirror as truer than the physical body which at this point has not developed the motor skills sufficiently to respond to the physical ambitions of the body. Hence, the child's recognition of the mirror image gives a false and idealised view of the body (Mulvey 17).

reversal of the superiority of the male power and social status (145). Fevvers is in charge of the situation while she performs her aerialist number and controls the spectator's gaze. Martín states that it is the knowledge of the meaning of power that enables women to limit the power over them and use it to take control over their own lives and future (194). Fevvers enthrals the spectators, but at the same time she depends on her audience as she needs to see herself reflected in its gaze. Without the audience her performance fulfils no function and she has no purpose.

Although Stoddart recognises the relevance of some key ideas in Mulvey's essay when analysing a text, she considers it restricted to film studies (*Angela* 26).[54] Yet, I would like to point out that it is a highly relevant text when approaching narratives dealing with gender performance. First and foremost, works that are concerned with the gaze are of great importance to Butler's theories on gender performance as a spectacle. Butler, as well as Mulvey, relies on psychoanalytic theories of the phantasmatic status of the body as she considers that the body is materialised through imaginary frameworks. As Jagger notes, Butler draws on Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's identification process of forming the sexed body (69-70). In short, whereas Mulvey is concerned with the representation of the female body within a phallocentric framework, Butler goes one step further and considers woman outside a heterosexual matrix to destabilise gendered presumptions regarding binary gender identities.

Carter engages with the extended metaphor of urban life as a theatrical spectacle to consider questions concerning gender identity. Fevvers expands the limits of the stage to continue performing off stage by converting the city into a metaphorical scene.

[54] Jagger remarks that Butler criticises the psychoanalysts' framing of the body within heterosexual norms and dual sexual difference (69). Laura Mulvey's theories on the power of the gaze within the world of spectacle can be applied to textual as well as cinematic narratives. Although Mulvey combines spectacle and narrative, her work becomes crucial to neo-Victorian fiction dealing with gender as the genre combines performance with narrative techniques.

As she crosses the boundaries of the stage and proceeds with her performance in real life the heroine reveals that gender roles are the result of imposed social and cultural norms. Jagger's distinction between theatrical performance and gender performance is particularly relevant here as the enactments are carried outside the context of spectacle. Lloyd notes that Butler criticises Kristeva among others for placing subversion outside culture, whereas Butler insists on subversion as a cultural practice (54). I will argue here that off-stage gender performance is as subversive as on-stage theatrical performance. The extension of the stage to the city emphasises the theatricality of gender performance and reveals gender identity as the result of a stylised repetition of social enactments. Thereby, the off-stage enactments become a repetition of "sustained social performances" which creates gender identity at the moment of action (Butler qtd. in Lloyd 21). The protagonist defies fixed gender roles and continues acting on the city stage. Fevvers shows characteristics like independence and mobility which were attributes to be considered male in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, according to Wilson, some women used these strategies as survival devices in the city (E Wilson 294). By incorporating theatricality into reality Fevvers integrates the power and the control achieved on stage into real lives. Hence, she uses the city as a metaphorical stage in order to challenge the established patriarchal order.

Through her enactments Fevvers keeps the spectator in a state of uncertainty which puts her in control. It is not only Fevvers's person that is ambiguous but her body is also a set of contradictions. Her gender identity is grounded in the gap between masculinity and femininity. Since she does not fit in the representative image of woman Walser starts doubting over her sex. Fevvers keeps the illusion of her stage persona steady at all times, on and off stage, which enables her to transfer the control of her audience during her spectacle on stage into real life off stage. Fevvers controls the

interview and the interviewer without Walser realising it. Instead he is caught up in Fevvers's performance and manipulated by her and Lizzie. The spectator becomes enthralled by her spectacle on stage and Fevvers is still in control off stage as she charms the beholder of the gaze through her performance behind the scene. In Palmer's words: "in her performances, off stage as well as on, she strives – often precariously – to elude male control, and remains, in general, triumphantly in charge of her own production" ("Gender as Performance" 32). Fevvers decides what sides of her identity she wants to show and what impression she wants to give. At no point in the novel she offers a uniform image of herself, because who she is and her gender identity originate in her performance.

Even though Fevvers transfers the control achieved on stage during her spectacle by continuing her performance off stage, at two points she loses control over the situation because she loses control of the gaze. The first time is the episode where she dines with the Grand Duke in St. Petersburg. Her greed for material things leads her to participate in the Grand Duke's script where, according to Palmer, femininity becomes an entrapment for women by performing male-scripted roles ("Gender as Performance" 33). By allowing the Grand Duke to define her according to his view, she puts herself in an inferior position and loses control because she is no longer in charge of her own production. She participates in his script instead of performing her own spectacle which diminishes her power. For a moment she allows herself to be subjected to the male gaze which objectifies her and tries to define her into one single identity. Fevvers becomes entrapped in his production and the Grand Duke attempts to bring her under his control by turning her into a bird in a gilded cage.

The third volume takes Fevvers to the Siberian tundra, and this is where the second incident of losing her ground occurs, and significantly, she is deprived of

Walser's gaze. When the travelling circus company is temporarily stranded on the Siberian tundra after a train wreck, Fevvers starts losing more and more of herself as she is deprived of the audience and with it her identity. Fevvers gives up her off-stage performance and neglects her aspect: "[s]he presented a squalid spectacle, a dark half-inch at the roots of her uncombed hair which tangled with the dishevelled plumage that had already assumed a dusty look. Confinement did not suit her" (Carter 235). The people around her grow accustomed to her aspect and Fevvers loses their gaze and with it their admiration. At their first reunion Walser does not recognise Fevvers because of his amnesia. He has lost his gaze and after living together with the shaman he no longer sees her as extraordinary. Moreover, with the loss of the gaze, Walser has neutralised his patriarchal view and is prepared to see Fevvers outside "an active/passive heterosexual" framework (Mulvey 20). Furthermore, Walser has internalised the Shaman's particular way of perceiving the world: "he made no categorical distinction between seeing and believing . . . there existed no difference between fact and fiction; instead, a sort of magic realism" (Carter 308). Fevvers remains in control as long as she keeps her audience wondering over her ambiguous nature. Walser is no longer dazzled by her appearance and looks at her instead of gazing. With the loss of Walser's gaze, Fevvers loses control over him because his eyes "[seem] to have lost their power to reflect" (Carter 343), and without the spectator's gaze her performance has no purpose. When Fevvers and Walser meet again she sees herself reflected in his eyes:

> In Walser's eyes [Fevvers] saw herself, at last, swimming into definition . . . She felt herself trapped forever in the reflection of Walser's eyes. For one moment, just one moment, Fevvers suffered the worst crisis of her life: 'Am I fact or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or am I what he thinks I am? (Carter 344)

Fevvers becomes unsure whether it is her idea of herself or Walser's image of her that is true. Yet, as Butlerian gender theory proposes, gender is the result of acts of performance which is created in cooperation with either an imaginary or real audience. Sceats argues that Fevvers is not remade, but restored with the admiration of Walser's gaze since it makes her whole (93-94). What has changed is Walser, and with him, his gaze. Hence, he no longer tries to impose his gaze on Fevvers and has become an apt man for the New Woman. Fevvers needs to see herself reflected in the eyes of the beholder to have a complete identity. According to de Beauvoir, man identifies himself through having his image fixed in the gaze of the Other (282). Carter feminises the idea by changing the perspective from male to female and makes Fevvers identify herself in Walser's gaze. By now, Walser no longer tries to define her according to male definitions of woman. Consequently, Fevvers's identification process is completed outside patriarchal frameworks. The fluidity of gender identity is emphasised by Carter by having Fevvers swimming into definition as she mirrors herself in Walser's gaze. For a moment she realises that her own identity is multifaceted and fluid, and questions her own personhood. However, she fails to see that her identity is defined both by her gender performance *and* by the spectator's interpretation of it. Thus, gender identity is a concept of cooperative making.

Nights at the Circus is imbued with performativity in theme, structure and mode, and what is more, the novel's structure can be aligned to a three-act play. The heroine's progress in three steps is reflected in the evolution of the novel that mirrors the development of a three-act play. It is composed of a tripartite structure, each part corresponding to how the protagonist's personal development evolves in three stages in relation to her performance. The protagonist stages her gender performance in three acts that depicts the process of spatialising identity—each performative space connotes a

stage in Fevvers's development of selfhood. Stephen J. Cannell explains that the division of a play into three acts follows certain division moves which can be labelled as presentation, complication and resolution (n. pag.). While the first act provides the background of the plot and prepares for what is to follow, the second act presents a complication of the plot and near the end of this act, the hero's plans are destroyed which usually occurs in an anticlimax. Finally, in the third act a climactic event takes place shortly before the resolution.

My examination of *Nights at the Circus* has followed the novel's structure and the protagonist's performative evolution from her enactments in exploitative environments as Ma Nelson's brothel and Madame Schreck's female freak show, to her career as professional artist until finally reaching personal fulfilment. Stoddart notices that the novel is theatrical in style, content and structure and points out that "*Nights at the Circus* mimics the classical three-act play (including a final 'Envoi') . . . and [has an] unlikely cast of characters" (*Angela* xi-xii). Although Stoddart identifies the three acts of the novel according to its three parts and different settings: London, St Petersburg and Siberia (*Angela* xi), the critic does not examine the progress of the heroine's development in relation to the theatrical structure. As analysed in this section, the three volumes correspond to different stages in Fevvers's development that are aligned to different performative spaces, and as the heroine progresses she must face several obstacles. Therefore, *Nights at the Circus* arguably follows the arrangement of traditional three-act play into preparation, complication and resolution. As previously mentioned, Fevvers's identity depends on her performance, and her search for a way of defining her own femininity is reflected in the different stages of her theatrical career. In each stage Fevvers experiments with performance and faces obstacles in her search for her own womanhood.

As mentioned earlier, the first act starts behind the curtains, and Fevvers's performance begins off stage for Walser and the reader. The first part is set in London and is dedicated to Fevvers's past which prepares the reader for what is going to happen. Fevvers gives the story of her background from her childhood in a brothel and as a freak in Madame Schreck's Museum of Female Monsters. During the first act, Fevvers is starting her performative career and experiments with enthralling her audience with her spectacle. The focus is on Fevvers's body which is emphasised by using settings as a brothel and a freak show where sexual exploitation and objectification of the female body are central. After learning the potential of her performance she continues to explore theatrical spaces to find her place as a powerful woman. In the second act, the reader is familiarised with her present state as a music-hall star. Then the story proceeds to St. Petersburg where Fevvers becomes a circus diva. Being on stage she keeps the audience controlled by dazzling them with her spectacle. However, off stage when the Duke invites her to dinner she nearly becomes subjected to his power. By playing along his script, Fevvers gets entangled in his production up to the point that she nearly turns into a bird in a gilded cage. Russo remarks that female narcissism as representative for women is parodied and reversed in the performative spaces and "[accompanied] by the hyperbole of self-consciousness that is female masquerade" (139). Temporarily tempted by the Grand Duke's gifts, Fevvers falls victim of his admiration. By "furnishing a spectacle for the male gaze" and participating in male-scripted roles Fevvers permits the Grand Duke to define her, and is thereby close to lose her essence (Palmer, "Gender as Performance" 31). At the end of the second part, the heroine is near destruction by the Grand Duke but has a close escape.

In the third act, Fevvers suffers a momentary crisis and loses foothold when she is without her audience. Fevvers is defined by her performance and her identity relies on the spectator's gaze, thereby she feels lost without her audience. The aerialist is a proto-feminist who looks for a man apt for a New Woman. Against Lizzie's warnings, she is determined to make a suitable partner of Walser: "I'll sit on him, I'll hatch him out, I'll make a new man of him. I'll make him into the New Man, in fact, a fitting mate for the New Woman, and onward we'll march hand in hand into the New Century" (Carter 334). The climax arrives at the moment when Walser and Fevvers are reunited and the heroine re-establishes her identity: "[Walser's] eyes fixed upon her with astonishment, with awe, the eyes that told her who she was" (Carter 345). In the last scene of the novel, or the final envoi as the title points out, the reader is provided with concluding remarks of the story before the curtain closes. At the end Fevvers finds herself and has achieved to turn Walser into a New Man for the New Woman:

> Her released feathers brushed against the walls; he recalled how nature had equipped her only for the 'woman on top' position and rustled in the straw mattress. He was as much himself again as he ever would be, and yet that 'self' would never be the same again . . . 'And now, hatched out of the shell of unknowing by a combination of a blow on the head and a sharp spasm of erotic ecstasy, I shall have to start all over again.' (Carter 347-50)

The curtain closes with Fevvers on top of Walser which is a "reversal of conventional gender roles [where] women are in control of the situation and man is relegated to the subordinate position" (Palmer, "Gender as Performance" 32).

As stated in the beginning of this section, *Nights at the Circus* is acknowledged as a key text in the development of neo-Victorianism and often referred to as a precursor of this historical subgenre. Strangely enough, the novel has not received much

critical attention within neo-Victorian studies while scholars have examined it as a postmodern or carnivalesque novel focusing on how Carter blurs the thin line between fact and fiction, which is embodied in Fevvers. Significantly, Fevvers's account represents a stance of attributing a voice to the historically silenced, in this case women, to offer an alternative history to the male-centred narratives of Western tradition, and in the process deconstruct patriarchal images of femininity. Voice, vision and agency converge in spatialising of identity as Fevvers negotiates a female space within the public sphere through her enactments in different performative spaces on and off the stage. In this regard, Carter combines the specular encounter of the freak show with the spectacular world of the circus in an exuberant literary performance that destabilises fixed categories in every possible sense – history, space and gender – This, together with the novel's stress on visual fields of power dynamics and Fevvers's ability to manipulate the audience gaze, clearly distinguish *Nights at the Circus* as a novel of spectacle.

To conclude, Carter's novel opens up a new space to explore gender issues. The proliferation of novels set within the neo-Victorian world of spectacle that has occurred for the last years can be traced back to *Nights at the Circus*. Taken the current interest in Victorian entertainment spaces in contemporary literature I think that the meaning of Carter's novel has still not been exhausted. On the contrary, the growing popularity of neo-Victorian popular culture points towards a revived interest in Carter's novel in the future. In next section I will examine how Sarah Waters's retrieves the Victorian music hall in *Tipping the Velvet* to stage present-day issues regarding non-heteronormative identities and issues. In doing so, she takes on from Carter's feminist revision to push an overtly queer agenda.

5.2. Spatialising Lesbian Identity in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998)

Set mainly in the 1890s London against the backdrop of the music hall and lesbian subcultures in Victorian England, *Tipping the Velvet* combines theatricality and gender performance bringing together the visual and vocal features of neo-Victorianism. Same-sex desire between women makes up the core of the narrative and lesbians are rendered visibility and granted a voice by being turned into protagonists. The novel depicts the maturation process of Nancy Astley, or Nan, and follows her on a journey towards individual fulfilment, from discovering same-sex desire to coming to terms with her lesbian identity. Waters has repeatedly expressed her interest in Victorian London as modern gay subcultures sprung up at this period (qtd. in Hogan n. pag.). In an interview she admits that she turns to the past "looking for sites of interest and possibility around sexuality or around gender" and adds that she takes interest in class issues as well (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 43). Hence, the temporal, locational and spatial settings of the novel are carefully chosen by the author to delve into the past and excavate lesbian history to push a contemporary queer agenda.

Contemporary undertakings of retracting lesbianism into history face two main problems that persisted until late-Victorian era: firstly, same-sex affection between women was perceived as a kindred and spiritual relationship rather than recognised as a specific identity, and secondly, there was a lack of language to describe lesbianism. As Faderman has convincingly has demonstrated in her study of female homosexuality throughout history, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, it was a common belief until late nineteenth century that women were asexual, hence lesbianism was perceived in terms of relationships, not an identity, which "society appeared to condone . . . rather than to view . . . as disruptive of the social structure" (16). In fact, romantic friendships

between women were tolerated as they did not represent a threat to masculine supremacy, and as Faderman notes, it was not until the 1890s when women within the feminist movement struggled to increase independence and sought after alternative family structures that "love between women became threatening to social structure" (237-38). As mentioned before, Emma Donoghue - a lesbian and a feminist writer who feels attracted to historical fiction just as Waters - insists on the lack of terminology and restricted language to describe lesbian identities in the past (*Inseparable* 8, O'Neill 4). Waters has admitted that she wanted to write a lesbian historical novel, and it seemed perfect to set it in the 1890s because it was a time of change and emergence of a social consciousness among lesbians (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 44). In addition to this, Victorian London with its inherent performative characteristics alongside the specific music-hall dynamics allow Waters to explore performativity of gender by hooking contemporary gender theories onto entertainment spaces of Victorian popular culture, and consequently she combines space, gender and performativity in her treatment of lesbianism in *Tipping the Velvet*.

The novel has received considerate critical attention and scholars coincide on that it is a queer *Bildungsroman* that depicts the maturation process of a lesbian heroine. Her individual evolution is closely linked to her career as an actress and the trope of theatricality permeates the novel as a whole as the heroine transgresses the boundaries of the stage in her performance. Stefania Ciocia points out that, "Nan's development is closely connected to her gaining the ability to master the city *as a stage*" ("Journeying" n. pag.). She combines Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the carnivalesque in literature with a feminist socio-historical perspective on women's accessibility to the streets in the Victorian period. Ciocia explores the idea of the city as a stage arguing that Nan transfers the spectacle into the streets. The critic argues that

> the novel gradually moves from the theatre as such, where performers and audience are neatly differentiated, occupying well-marketed and separate places, to the boundless stage of the square and the city streets, where the gap between actors and spectators is erased by a universal and subversive participation to the show. ("Journeying" n. pag.)

Moreover, she stresses how the novel straddles two genres, the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque novel, and thus, "effectively retain[s] the subversive outsider perspective of the picaresque" ("Journeying" n. pag.). However, the scholar disregards the relevance of Nan's on- and off-stage performances to her lesbian identity and fails to notice Waters's employment of twentieth-century queer theories to explore the performative nature of gender. I consider that this is the main flaw in Ciocia's article as she adopts a heteronormative framework to an overtly lesbian and political novel as *Tipping the Velvet*, which limits it to a heterosexual reading and consequently oversees the central topic of the novel: gender performance and the journeying towards lesbian selfhood.

Conversely, Emily Jeremiah offers an examination of Butler's theory on gender performance and stresses that rather than essentialising queer identities in *Tipping the Velvet*, "Nan [is] forced to acknowledge altruism and alterity" as she assumes that her identity is multiple and shifting, and consequently, "the *Bildung* described is no simple coming-out tale" (Jeremiah 136). Nan's strife for lesbian selfhood is tied to the performative nature of gender identity and Waters clearly draws on Butler's theory in the description of the protagonist's discovery, recognition and assertion of lesbian identity. Consequently, I wish to resume the idea of *Tipping the Velvet* as a coming-out novel because, surprisingly, scholars do not give importance to this aspect of the narrative although it is, in my opinion, central to the plot. Even though Ciocia considers that Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy depicts the coming out of the lesbian heroines ("The

Textual Politics" n. pag.), she does not explore this issue and I regard that *Tipping the Velvet* would benefit from an in-depth reading of the coming-out process. Here, I will follow Donoghue's definition of the act of coming out, which she describes as, "[the] persistent desire for people of the same sex—and of recognizing that as an important fact about oneself" to identify with a certain personal type and social minority, sexual orientation as central to her sense of self (*Inseparable* 160). She asserts that coming-out fiction generally follows a storyline that consists in three phases: discovery, recognition and public or private acknowledgement of same-sex preference (*Inseparable* 160).[55] I will argue that the three volumes of *Tipping the Velvet* depict these three phases and mirror Nan's development and maturation process and coming out.

Furthermore, I will explore Water's depiction of Nan's on- and off-stage performances applying Butler's theory on gender performance, lesbian space and lesbian subjectivity. In particular, I will focus on how the protagonist transgresses spatial boundaries and defies the public/private dichotomy as she transfers the spectacle into real life, turning the city into a huge stage set. Contrary to Ciocia's heternormative reading, I will follow on from Jeremiah by deepening the analysis of Butlerian thought, and, in addition, examine the implicit visual structures of Nan's spectacle and the inherent power hierarchies. I will argue that Nan passes through three different phases that encompass five different stages – theatrical and metaphorical, public and private – which she uses as settings to explore gender identity. The three phases that describe her maturation process contribute a two-fold meaning to the novel. On the one hand, it mirrors Nan's coming out and coming to terms with her lesbian identity, and on the

[55] Donoghue notices that lesbian coming-out stories have been a dominant branch within lesbian literature during the late twentieth century and is still a popular sub-genre at the present. The author has contributed with the two coming-out novels *Stir Fry* (1994) and *Hood* (1995).

other hand, this tripartite structure contributes to the performative mode of the novel which resembles the structure of a three-act play.

Following the structure of the novel, I will analyse each stage in Nan's development according to the three volumes. I will focus on how space and gender are conceptualised and examine how Waters depicts "[the] desire for another woman's body as productive, as that which may produce alternative conceptions of space" (Probyn 79). Starting with volume one, which is set in her hometown Whistable, I will part from her discovery of same-sex desire and analyse how this is the first phase in Nan's coming-out process. Then, I will proceed to examine the second phase of recognition and focus on how she transgresses the limits of the stage to find different modes of expressing lesbian identity in real life using, first the streets, then, Felicity Palace as her stage. Next, I will argue that during the third phase of public acknowledgement, Nan comes to terms with her lesbian identity within the socialist and proto-feminist movement. Finally, my aim is to prove that Waters applies the neo-Victorian performative mode to push an overt lesbian agenda and subsequently comments on queer identity both in the past and the present.

Donoghue stresses how "a recognition of same-sex desire, and a movement outward, upward, toward coming to some kind of terms with it" is common to almost coming-out novels (*Inseparable* 162-63). Contrary to Ciocia's argument that Nan's personal fulfilment is mirrored in the geographical journeying towards the centre of London which is aligned to the protagonist's maturation, I intend to examine how her coming out testifies to the performative nature of gender, as Butler holds, has no inner organising core but originates in a reiterated and ongoing process (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190-91). That gender is performative means that it originates in acts, gestures and discursive means which are articulated by the individual. In that respect, gender is a

social construct since it is socially articulated through acts of performance. These acts create the idea of gender and if there were no acts there would be no gender at all, i.e. what constitutes gender are the social enactments performed by the individual. In other words, gender performance creates gender and shapes gender identity.

Nan is an oyster-girl from the small-town Whitstable who has a passion for the music hall. She spends her days between working in the kitchen of her family's oyster parlour to the rhythm of music-hall songs and visits the Canterbury music hall together with her sister Alice whenever she has the occasion. Significantly, Waters introduces the trope of theatricality and establishes the key theme from outset by symbolically characterising Nan as an oyster-girl. This becomes clear the moment her father describes an oyster as a shape-shifter: "[f]or the oyster, you see, is what you might call a real queer fish – now a he, now a she, as quite takes fancy. A regular morphodite, in fact!" (Waters, *Tipping* 49). There are several references to queerness in the novel and Jeremiah claims that the repeated use of the word queer stresses the present-ness of the issues treated in the novel and in particular alludes to Butler's theory on gender performance, as for instance the male impersonator Kitty Butler, whose name is an allusion to Judith Butler (132-33).

Lesbian identity and gender performance are contextualised within the world of spectacle, and Nan's sexual awakening and discovery of same-sex desire is triggered the first time she sees the male impersonator Kitty Butler performing a cross-dressed act. Kift contends that within the music hall "conventions [were] ridiculed and destroyed" and asserts that "[the actress's] expression of self-confidence and control . . . served as a source of identification and affirmation for many working-class women in the audience who did not conform to the socially accepted conventions" (47). The Victorian music hall provided a space where women, both as performers and spectators, could search for

alternative models of femininity. While Kift addresses the issue in terms of space, gender and class, Waters ponders on lesbian subjecthood within the frame of the Victorian world of spectacle. Before describing Nan's same-sex desire overtly, Waters connotes her lesbian identity by implicitly hinting at it by putting a stress on the word queer, as for example when Nan describes her impression of Kitty: "[m]y view of her now, of course, was side-on and rather queer" (Waters, *Tipping* 17).

Moreover, Nan's experience within the music hall culture testifies to Waters's criticism of categorising the body, sex, sexual desire and gender into binary categories. Kitty's cross-dressed show triggers Nan's sexual awakening and leads her to discover her lesbian desire, which reveals gender and sexual desire as independent of sexual categorisation:

> Her figure, too, was boy-like and slender – yet rounded, vaguely but unmistakable, at the bosom, the stomach, and the hips, in a way no real boy's ever was; and her shoes, I noticed after a moment, had two inch heels to them. But she strode like a boy, and stood like one, with her feet apart and her hands trust carelessly into her trouser pockets, and her head at an arrogant angle, at the very front of the stage; and when she sang, her voice was a boy's voice – sweet and terribly true. (Waters, *Tipping* 13)

As Nan gazes at Kitty she realises that women can look different and behave distinctly than according to the available roles of femininity as proposed by the heteropatriarcal norm, and in this sense Kitty represents the first available model of lesbian identity for Nan.

The protagonist has been unaware of the possibility of same-sex desire and a female gender identity that does not fit into binary categorisation of gender as stipulated by heteropatriarchal normativity. In this context, Nan's discovery is two-fold as she

discovers both the possibility and existence of non-normative gender roles, as well as her own erotic desire for women. The temporal setting is significant as Nan's queer consciousness emerges at the time when medical doctors where turning the clinical gaze towards lesbian women and Waters comments on this in the novel. As detailed in section 2.2.2., in the 1880s doctors such as Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis termed lesbian women "inverts" and claimed that women who manifested same-sex desire were either mentally ill or low-class criminals. Llewellyn notes, Dr Ellis claimed that "female homosexuality could only exist in the 'lower races', by which he meant the working class and the criminally deviant" ("Queer?" 209). This is reflected in Nan's first impression of Kitty "it was the hair, I think, which drew me the most. If I had ever seen women with hair as short as hers, it was because they had spent time in hospital or prison; or because they were mad" (Waters, *Tipping* 12). This testifies to Waters's historical knowledge of the Victorian period, and while only briefly mentioned in *Tipping the Velvet*, the author further explores lesbianism as madness or criminality in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*.

In addition, Waters hints at the lack of language to describe lesbian affection in Nan's struggle to find the right words to describe her lesbian feelings as she tells her sister about her emotions:

> 'When I see her,' I said, 'it's like – I don't know what it's like. It's like I never saw anything at all before. It's like I am filling up . . . She makes me want to smile and weep, at one. She makes me sore here.' I placed a hand upon my chest, upon the breastbone. 'I never saw a girl like her before. I never knew that there were girls like her. (Waters, *Tipping* 20)

This is the first time Nan talks about her lesbianism, and as Waters reiterates the same language used to describe heterosexual love she normalises same-sex desire on the one

hand, and, on the other hand, she points at the lack of words to speak about lesbianism. Her sister's reaction makes Nan realise that lesbian feelings are not easily accepted and tolerated, not even spoken of in the bedroom the most private and intimate of spaces: "I found I could say no more. . . . There was another silence . . . I had said too much – but it was that or say nothing. . . [Alice] didn't speak; she only rolled away from me, and faced the wall" (Waters, *Tipping* 21).

Gill Jagger emphasises the difference between gender performance and theatrical performance and notices that the confusion of these two concepts have resulted in misreadings of Butler's theories, and states the following:

> [o]ne of the main causes of controversy in the reception of *Gender Trouble* arose from the tendency to associate the notion of performance presented there with theatrical models of subjectivity, which imply that there is an actor who chooses which script to follow and then does the acting – and in this sense is separable from the act. This, then, would seem to imply voluntarism and the idea that there is some sort of everyday optionality about sex, gender and even the body. Moreover, Butler's account of the performativity of gender does involve a notion of performance and often does invoke a sense of theatricality, which contributes to this confusion. (Jagger 21)

Cross-dressing is a theatrical manifestation of gender performance and the way Waters juxtaposes theatrical enactments of male impersonation on stage with lesbian subjectivity off stage renders gender performance visible, as the protagonist explores the performative potential of both public and private spaces and tests the limits of expressing lesbian desire.

The spatial specificity of the performance of gender identities on the music-hall stage locates lesbian identity in a public space that has generally been associated with

the power of the male gaze. I have pointed out earlier that *Tipping the Velvet* brings together visual and vocal features of the neo-Victorian performative mode, and Waters queers the gaze in a way that subverts male and heteronormative visual structures. Lisa Walker highlights how

> models of visibility dominate queer theory. In particular, the authors' focus on how gay and lesbians reoccupy not just "straight" styles but also "straight" spaces is useful to theorizing alternative models of gender/sexual difference. The idea of the ga(y)ze and how looking constructs gay spaces shifts us from the question of "how do I look (appear)?" to "how do I look (see)?" (75)

Walker applies the word "ga(y)ze" to describe the queer gaze, refering to both gay and lesbian people. As I have noted in section 2.1.2., Valentine uses the term "the gay(ze)" to describe queer visual encounters where lesbians "[produce] a small fissure in hegemonic heterosexual space" (Valentine 150). Although Valentine's term is very apt to describe the queer gaze, I favour Walker's label "the ga(y)ze" as I find that there is greater stress on vision than on sexual identity in contrast to "the gay(ze)". I suggest that Waters connotes this in *Tipping the Velvet* when Nan and Kitty momentarily create a lesbian gap as their gazes, or ga(y)zes, meet during the performance:

> every time her gaze swept the crowded hall it seemed to brush my own, and dally with it a little longer than it should. . . . I saw her leave the stage – again, her gaze met mine – and the return for her encore . . . She held my flustered gaze with her own more certain one, and made a little bow. Then she stepped backwards suddenly, waved to the hall, and left us. (Waters, *Tipping* 26)

Nan sees through her disguise and theatrical enactment because she recognises her own queer identity in Kitty as they ga(y)ze at each other. They create a fissure for a brief and

private encounter of mutual recognition through the ga(y)ze, and consequently, their lesbian desire protrudes heteronormative space.

The first phase in Nan's maturation process and coming out depicts her discovery, yet this is not restricted to Nan's revelation of the existence of lesbian women and her own lesbian desire. I consider that her discovery phase also describes her first advances towards finding her own lesbian identity. She joins Kitty in London, first as her dresser and then as a male impersonator in a double drag show. Cheryl A Wilson suggests that Nan's emerging lesbian identity is related to her performative formation in the London music halls, and further argues that on stage Nan learns that gender is a social construct by playing the different roles of lesbian lover, music hall masher and actress (C A Wilson 295-96). Her stint as a male impersonator in the music hall opens up a new world for her and the experience of freedom, independence and empowerment on stage. In section 3.2.2. I have challenged the stereotypical view on the Victorian actress as a disrespectable and immoral figure, to instead focus on the music-hall stage as a social space where female performers could transgress and subvert social categories of gender to instead negotiate gender roles and appropriate a female space within the public sphere. As discussed in section 3.2.2., several critics – Bailey, Tracy C Davis, Kift and Powell, just to mention a few – have affirmed that a career on the stage offered women the chance to exert agency within the public sphere as active and professional performers. Specific characteristics of music-hall culture like the direct address, knowingness and appearing in character created a special atmosphere in the halls as the dynamics diminished the distance between audience and performers and created a social space of social comment on issues regarding national identity, gender and class. In this vein, the stage offers Nan the freedom to transgress socially constructed gender roles and explore her own identity.

Waters declares in an interview that she resorted to the Victorian music hall and male impersonation because she felt drawn by "what that might mean for women viewers and for the women doing it" (qtd. in Hogan n. pag.). Nan's epiphanic stage debut as a male impersonator makes her realise yet another side of her personality that will prove central to her lesbian subjectivity: her fondness of cross-dressing and the subsequent freedom it offers her:

> [i]n those few, swift minutes I had glimpsed a truth about myself, and it had me left me awed and quite transformed. The truth was this: that whatever successes I might achieve as a girl, they would be nothing compared to the triumphs I should enjoy clad, however girlishly, as a boy. I had in short, found my vocation. (Waters, *Tipping* 123)

Nan's vocation for cross-dressing stretches beyond the stage and later I will look into how the protagonist makes use of her theatrical skills as a cross-dresser off-stage to pursue a lesbian identity.

The gaze is central to the world of spectacle, and in particular, the spectacle of the female body. Nan negotiates her position within the visual order on stage as she subverts the gaze to appropriate visual agency. In the music hall she becomes aware of the power of the gaze both in her position as a spectator and an actress. First, she is enhanced by Kitty's spectacle and enthralled by her ability to master the stage, and as a spectator Nan feels the magnetising effect of the gaze: "her effect upon that over-heated hall was wonderful. Like me, my neighbours all sat up, and gazed at her with shining eyes" (Waters, *Tipping* 13). When Nan joins the show, she is at first overwhelmed by being the object of the gaze at her debut. She is unable to act and becomes, according to Mulvey's notion of *to-be-looked-at-ness*, a passive object to the active male gaze and thereby subjected to his control (20). Nevertheless, Kitty rapidly enlightens her of the

subversive potential of the gaze, and Nan realises that the spectator is under the power of the gaze at the same time as he or she holds it:

> At first, so blinded was I by the lights, I couldn't see the crowd at all; I could hear it, rustling and murmuring – loud, and close, it seemed on every side. When at last I stepped for a second out of the glare of lime, and saw all the faces that were turned my way I almost faltered and lost my place – and would have done I think, had not Kitty at that moment pressed my arm and murmured, 'We have them!' . . . [I] realised that, unbelievably, she was right… (Waters, *Tipping* 122)

Her capacity to overturn the visual order that places her as a commercialised and objectified spectacle for the male gaze on stage, will later serve her to trespass the boundaries of the scene and destabilise power structures off stage through her appropriation of the gaze. This is an idea I will explore in Nan's second phase of recognition.

Nan and Kitty learn how to mime male behaviour by observing men in the streets of London. They walk about in the city as *flâneuses* gazing at men in order to adapt their dress and manner. This consists in a spatial practice in which Nan and Kitty are walking subjects that observe the city in terms of a spectacle. Subsequently, their theatrical view of urban life is incorporated into their music-hall number as they imitate true street-style to incorporate male behaviour into their show on stage. In this regard, Waters engages with what Bailey identifies as the essence of the music hall: the performers' ability to recreate the street style of the newly urbanised people in a naturalistic way (Bailey 137-38). As their manager, Walter, has ordered Kitty and Nan: "you must both of you go about the city and *study the men*! . . . *Scrutinise* 'em!" (Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* 83).

As a music hall masher Nan plays a sexually aggressive role and flirts with the female spectators. This reveals that the idea that women are sexually passive is something that is imposed by culture. Although theories on gender performance did not develop until the end of the twentieth century, the apprehension of gender as a performative entity has always existed, and as Kohlke points out: "Nan's androgynous facility to shift between female to male roles in her stage career and her stint as a rent boy enact feminist theories of gender as historically contingent [on] performativity" ("Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 9). Nan's spectacle has an erotic undertone as the audience recognises her as neither male nor female. There is a homoerotic element implied as both the men and women in the audience gaze at Nan either as an effeminate man or a mannish woman. In her role as a man, Nan is able to flirt openly with the audience. In the music hall it is Nan's talent as a singer and not her body that is in focus. However, by staging her female body she is still displayed as a spectacle for the male gaze that connotes to-be-looked-at-ness.

Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson proposes that women who are being watched take control themselves by feminising the gaze (206). The feminine gaze, she argues, "allows for illusion, performance, and subversive control" (Macpherson 206). Although she talks about the panoptical gaze,[56] the feminine gaze can be read into the general application of the power of the gaze – in this case the theatrical gaze – since both reverse power relations. In their performance as male impersonators, Kitty and Nan acquire the gaze on stage in the sense that they are able to control their audience through the enthralling power of the gaze. The gaze becomes feminised due to the fact that they are women under their disguise, and through the feminisation of the gaze

[56] The panopticon is a type of prison which is organised on the basis of constant surveillance. The inmates are kept in backlit cells and can be checked upon at any time by wards who remain invisible. Thereby the gaze becomes internalised and the prisoner behaves as if under continuous observation. Macpherson notices that the beholder of the gaze is imprisoned by the need to control the inmate, and that in turn, the prisoners invert power positions once they realise the power in being gazed upon (214).

power relations become reversed and Nan asserts both voice and agency in her performance by assuming the control of the gaze. Furthermore, Mulvey's analysis of the heterosexual division of man and woman into active/passive is undermined by Waters as she applies Butler's multiple view on gender. In this regard, "the position of spectator might be appropriated to enhance female agency" (Merritt 9), and subsequently subvert the scopic hierarchy that delimits women to a passive object of, what Mulvey refers to as "the masculinised gaze" (29). The scholar recognises the displayed woman, firstly, as the erotic desire of other male characters within the story and, secondly, as the projected desire of the male spectator in the audience (Mulvey 19), albeit she subsequently acknowledged the female audience and the female character as an active agent on stage, Mulvey abides a heterosexual framework. In contrast, Waters queers the visual structures that underpin the power dynamics of the spectacle.

Within the spectacle on stage, Nan becomes the same-sex object of erotic desire of Kitty, and also, the projection of the erotic desire of male and female spectators in the audience. In this sense, the (gay)ze disrupts the heteronormative frame as fissures are created between the lesbian audience and Nan during her cross-gendered act. As Kift argues, "hidden beneath both costume and text [is] something distinctly more wordly and knowing" that relies on the audience's ability to read between the lines (47), something that Bailey refers to as "knowingness" (77).[57]

Nan and Kitty initiate a relationship, one that they maintain as a secret while they openly transgress gender boundaries on stage in their roles as male impersonators. Importantly, Kitty stands as a foil to Nan during her stage of discovery. While Nan is

[57] Bailey notices that "knowingness disallowed precise instruction – knowingness, that persistent tone in much nineteenth-century popular culture" (77). Moreover, the double entendre was crucial to interpret the message that was imbedded in the intonation and body language that often contradicted and subverted the literal meaning of the discourse delivered on stage, which addressed cultural values combining criticism with humour. For further descriptions of knowingness, see Bailey's volume *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (1998).

attempting to disclose lesbian identity, Kitty refuses to recognise herself as one and prefers to maintain a closeted relationship. Kitty introduces Nan to cross-dressing and instructs her to become a male impersonator, nevertheless, she also teaches Nan that while they can display their queer identities in public on the stage, their divergent desire must remain private off stage. Nan and Kitty openly expose their lesbianism on stage and is accepted and tolerated by the audience because it is perceived as a theatrical enactment:

> A double act is always twice the act the audience thinks: beyond our songs, our steps, our bits of business with coins and canes and flowers, there was a private language, in which we held an endless, delicate exchange of which the crowd knew nothing. This was a language not of the tongue but of the body . . . but that was our show; only the crowd never knew it. They looked on, and saw another turn entirely. (Waters, *Tipping* 128)

Kitty is aware of the social transgression their lesbian desire represents and is careful not to admit her lesbianism in public. She reacts with hostility to Nan's joy in encountering another lesbian couple and in recognising their kinship. Kitty warns Nan of the dangers of being recognised as one herself, "'They're not like us! They're not like us, at all. They're *toms*.' . . . 'You would have to give up the stage,' she said seriously, 'and so would I if there was talk about us, if people thought we were – *like that*'" (Waters 131). In this sense, while Nan journey[s] towards lesbian communality (Jeremiah 139), Kitty struggles to fit into heteronormative society.

Marjorie Garber links cross-dressing to theatricality focusing on "the way in which clothing constructs (and deconstructs) gender and gender differences" (3). For Garber "one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categorisation of

'female' and 'male' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural" (10). As argued above, Butler's theory on gender performance has been questioned as concepts as performativity and theatricality have caused confusion. Importantly, gender performance does imply theatricality, yet not necessarily in the context of theatre or acting. While Butler holds that gender identity is a stylised repetition of social acts, Jagger remarks that Butler asserts

> embodied subjectivity and human action which does not take the body itself as the source of meaning and identity. It rather focuses on the significatory practices which endow particular bodies with social and symbolic meaning and which structure the everyday actions of the embodied subjects. (23)

The music hall represents a social space where Nan finds freedom to negotiate her lesbian subjectivity and her insight into the performative nature of gender, which she discovers through cross-dressing on stage that will enable her to explore her lesbian identity off stage.

As argued above, Nan and Kitty's exposure of gender transgression is accepted on stage precisely because it is perceived as a theatrical role. In these lines, Garber asserts that "[t]he appeal of cross-dressing is clearly related to its status as a sign of the constructedness of gender categories. But the tendency on the part of many critics have been to look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser" (Garber 9). This is an issue that has been contested in neo-Victorian literature that places cross-dressing at the core of the narrative.[58] In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters puts an emphasis on the difference between gender performance and theatrical enactments and the permeability of binary gender categories. Allison Neal draws attention to how one spectator detects Kitty and Nan's embodied subversion "that until that moment has gone undetected, no matter how

[58] Peter Ackroyd plays with idea of looking through and looking at the cross-dresser in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) as the heroine Elizabeth Cree, a male impersonator, performs crimes in male disguise after retiring from the her music-hall career.

much it was implied" (62). A drunken audience member interrupts them during the cross-dressing spectacle shouting at the crowd "they're nothing but a couple – a couple of *toms*" (Waters, *Tipping* 140). The drunken man looks at the performers rather than through the cross-dresser, and, in breaking the illusion that has up until this moment sustained, their enactment is shattered and "at the sound of it, the audience gave a great collective flinch . . . through the shaft of the limelights I saw their faces – a thousand of faces, self-conscious and appalled" (Waters, *Tipping* 141). The silence that circumscribes their lesbian affection is broken and once the observers detect Nan and Kitty's gender transgression, their enactment is no longer approved of. The show comes to an abrupt end, and consequently so does Kitty and Nan's relationship, as Kitty marries Walter to assure her reputation while Nan disappears heartbroken into the anonymity of London.

Whereas Kitty stifles her same-sex desire to fit into the prescribed role of womanhood and chooses to closet her lesbian identity to instead live in a heterosexual marriage with Walter, Nan enters into the second phase of journey towards lesbian selfhood. According to Donoghue, the phase of recognition in lesbian literature depicts how the heroine either struggles to suppress her divergent desire or is looking for ways to express it. In the second volume of the novel, which is the phase of recognition, Nan uses two different settings for her off-stage performances: the streets and Diana Lethaby's home Felicity Palace. This step in her progress towards lesbian subjectivity focuses on how Nan experiments with her sexuality and gender identity by transferring her performance off the stage, and here Waters clearly engages with Butlerian thought. Moya Lloyd remarks that "the idea of becoming a gender poses a challenge to the idea that gender is passively produced by patriarchy . . . Becoming implies, rather, that gendering is an achievement of some kind that gendered subjects themselves engage in"

(39). By transferring the spectacle of male impersonation off stage, Nan actively participates in composing her gender identity. In contrast to theatrical performance which is separable from the actor, gender performance is not independent of the performer. Hence, like Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* turns her performatory abilities into strategies to perform gender off stage, Nan uses her theatrical skills to repeat her stylised performance off stage in a social context. In short, Nan acquires her gender status "instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 191).

Arguably, Nan's theatrical interaction with the city is structured according to Lefebvre's triadic interpretation of the production of social space in which perceived and conceived space is made functional in the practice of every-day life. As described in section 2.1., Lefebvre denotes how urban dwellers' empirical deciphering of space embodies the connection between daily reality, or routine, and urban reality (38). Accordingly, the dialectical relationship between social practice and representations of space emerges in the functional process of space. Nan's engagement with the inherent theatricality of London testifies to this three-dimensional division of space as she maps out the city as a stage for off-stage social performances:

> [t]he world of actors and artistes, and the gay world in which I now found myself working, are not so very different. Both have London as their proper country, the West End as their capital. Both are a curious mix of magic and necessity, glamour and sweat. Both have their types – their *ingéneus* and *grandes dames*, their rising starts, their falling starts, their bill-toppers, their hacks … All this I learned, slowly but steadily, in the first weeks of my apprenticeship, just as I had learned my music-hall trade at Kitty's side. (Waters, *Tipping* 203)

The passage points at how inhabitants perceive London as a theatre and Nan conceives the streets as a huge stage set upon which she can continue her performance. Perceived and conceived space converge in Nan's gender performance, as the two levels are made functional in her every-day practice of cross-dressing. With London as backdrop Nan turns the streets into a metaphorical stage where she can explore lesbian identity, mainly by performing different roles using her skills as cross-dresser.

Butler remarks that the notion of binary gender and sexual identity is mocked within practices of drag and cross-dressing. Through the practice of imitating gender, drag performance exposes the constructed aspect of gender and reveals its imitative structure (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 187). Moreover, drag plays with the inner/outer appearance and true/false sexual identity. Therefore, through acts of performance, drag enactment serves as a tool to subvert gender codes and behaviour according to the socio-cultural framework. When Nan ventures into the streets in male apparel she transgresses gendered boundaries and gains access to the streets, and as a result, she destabilises and challenges socially imposed gender roles and spatial restrictions, and as Duncan remarks, "such performances and contests around power relations take place in *lived space*" (Introduction 5). Her off-stage performance in the streets testifies to the porosity of the public/private dichotomy as well as its artificiality.

Nan uses Kitty as her artistic name while she works as a renter, i.e. male prostitute. Dressing as a man enables her to stroll around the city with liberty, a practice that was limited for Victorian women. In section 3.1.1., I have asserted that women required a gender-specific consciousness that made her aware of the social restrictions and potential dangers to her sex in order to walk the streets. Waters is well familiar with this and explains that "cross-dressing has a freedom to wander the streets that none of

my other female characters ever had" (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 49).[59] Nan applies theatrical strategies to gain access to the streets and free herself from cultural restraints that limit women's mobility in the public sphere. The control attained on stage in the music hall is transferred to the streets in her off-stage performance as she takes possession of the streets dressed in male attire.

Waters gives a new feminist vision of London depicting it as a stage on which urban citizens are actors and spectators. Although there exist dangers for women, the city is portrayed as open for the female experience and the female characters move about in London exploring it. In this theatrical depiction of London, Nan develops her sexuality alongside her performatory skills which highlight gender performance. She falls deeper and deeper into her role as a man during her stint as a male renter in the city. When Nan breaks off with the music hall she disappears in London on her own and spends some time in isolation. After breaking up with her period in enclosure she goes back into the streets of London dressed as a man to be able to walk the streets freely at any hour. When she changes the scene for the streets she enters a new stage in her development, and for the first time she takes the streets by herself and she becomes a *flâneuse* in male disguise so that she can learn from the streets once more:

> For a week or two I continued to wander, and to watch, and to learn the ways and gestures of the world into which I had stumbled. Walking and watching, indeed, are that world's keynotes: you walk, and let yourself be looked at; you watch, until you find a face or figure you fancy; there is a nod, a wink, a shake of the head, a purposeful stepping to an alley or a rooming-house . . . (Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* 201)

[59] Waters makes reference to Judith Walkowitz in the interview with Dennis and states that she felt attracted by the social realities and class divisions that were mapped out into different topographical areas of London in the nineteenth century (Dennis, "Ladies in Peril" 49).

Nan prostitutes herself pretending to be a man. Her male costumers do not notice that she is a woman, so from being a music hall masher staging a woman in men's clothes she now passes as a boy. Whereas Nan's performance on stage resides in showing herself as a woman dressed in male apparel, her off-stage performance consists in passing as a man.

In the same fashion as the music-hall audience look through the performer rather than at the performer, people in the streets fail to see beyond Nan's cross-dressing and mistake her for a man. Her awareness of the inherent visual order of the gaze and her capacity to subvert the objectifying gaze to instead entrance the viewer by her performance grants her the possibility to stroll the streets. Helen Freshwater notices that

> performance theory has recently begun to widen its scope. It no longer limits its enquiries to the straightforwardly performative, but stretches its interests to include the realm of every-day life. Here the boundaries have not only been traversed but also transformed, as discrete disciplinary identities undergo a process of dissolution and the difference between theatre and life becomes increasingly difficult to define. (189-90)

In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters blurs the boundaries between life and theatre to allow the protagonist to explore her lesbian identity. Nan applies the theatrical skills acquired in the halls to master the urban scene and destabilises binary divisions as public/private and male/female in the process. Boundaries between theatre/real life, spectator/performer and male/female are dissolved as she continues her performance off stage.

Ciocia suggests that this is a carnivalesque instance that testifies to Nan's third-person or peripheral status characteristic of the picaresque novel ("Journeying" n. pag.). In addition, I propose that her performance and third-person status hinge on queer

theories of gender performance, and allude to Victorian medical theories that termed lesbianism as a third sex, which Faderman describes as follows:

> [a] lesbian by the sexologists' definition, was one who rejected what had long been woman's role. . . . she was member of a third sex . . . all her emotions were inverted, turned upside down: Instead of being passive, she was active, instead of loving domesticity, she sought success in the outside world. . . . she loved womankind more than mankind. (240)[60]

Therefore, I wish to argue that Waters's use of carnivalesque mode is anchored in her lesbian agenda. Nan's off-stage performances of gender together with her inbetweenness as cross-dresser pinpoint inversion of both social heteronormative order and of gender identity.

In a more recent article, Ciocia maintains her focus on the carnivalesque and theatrical elements of the novel and claims that Waters "expose[s] the cultural and theatrical nature of sexual identity: Nancy's true histrionic potential is revealed as she establishes her social, as well as her sexual role, walking through the streets of the capital" ("Textual Politics" n. pag.). I concur with Ciocia regarding Waters's concern with the cultural dimension of sexual identity, notwithstanding, the critic confuses the concepts of theatricality and performativity in relation to sexual identity. As I have detailed above, while theatricality is separable from the actor, gender arises in its performance and cannot be separated from the performer. Therefore, I suggest that Nan draws on her theatrical skills in her off-stage performances in the streets, however, these consist in stylised repetition of social enactments that are separate from her sexual role. In particular in her role as a renter, Waters twists and turns gender roles and

[60] Faderman draws on the writings on Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, who wrote *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1882) and *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* (1897) respectively, to argue that the medical interest in deviant women runs parallel to the rise of the new woman and women's demand for more rights. For detailed analysis of lesbian sexuality in the Victorian period and the medical response to female sexuality see part II in her volume *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981).

relationships in a complex way and reveals a sinister side to Nan who in the role as a male prostitute satisfies her male costumers' homosexual desire and fantasies.

Garber notices that one of the most important features of cross-dressing is how it challenges dual categories of sex by questioning "male" and "female" categories (10). This is an idea that Waters takes up in the novel the moment Nan sets eyes on Mrs Gray's rent sign and that announces a free room for female or a male tenant. Nan who does not comply with the binary gender categories finds herself in the in-betweenness in the sign: "Respectable Lady seeks Fe-Male lodger . . . there was something appealing about Fe-Male. I saw myself in it – in the hyphen" (Waters, *Tipping* 211). Nan's cross-dressing does not only mark the malleable nature of gender, but also stresses the fluid aspect of gender identity which makes her enactment possible. While she takes to the streets in male guise she assumes the role of a male renter and this is also her first sexual relations with the opposite sex.

Nan is picked up from the streets to become Diana Lethaby's lover at Felicity Palace. Now, Nan lives as a boy full time and is made to wear a dildo. Yet, at the same time she lives an enclosed life in the domestic sphere and her lesbianism is restricted to the private realm. I further suggest that Nan occupies the role of a phallic woman. According to Garber, the phallic woman "is a male transvestite, whose erotic pleasure comes from the 'reassurance' of being a phallic woman, of having a penis *and* dressing in women's clothes, his most reassuring symptom, according to clinicians is the erection itself . . . [is] the source of pleasure" (3). Although Nan is male cross-dresser attired with a dildo, these attributes are the source of pleasure in her and Diana's lovemaking. Moreover, Mulvey remarks, according to phallocentric theories: "[man] depends on the image of the castrated women to give order and meaning to his world" (14). Hence, Nan represents the phallic woman whose gaze mirrors the female lesbian subject to complete

her identification process. Since Nan is the object of Diana's gaze, she is consequently submitted to her control.

Their relationship can be defined in the terms of master and slave, and here the man, represented by Nan, is subjected to female dominance. Although Diana desires Nan for being a woman, she tries to transform her into a man. Nan's body is both male and female at once, and challenges the heterosexual categorisation of the body. Nan's sexuality represents queer theories of the body and reflects Butlerian notions of corporeality. As Jeremiah points out: "questioning the fixity of the terms 'man' and 'woman', the novel in fact queers heterosexuality, proposing new, fluid forms of desire and relationality" (139). Her commodification of Nan as a sexual object is also embedded in class issues and reflects the upper-class exploitation of the working classes. Dennis highlights that the novel is overtly politicised "Nan's role is to be objectified and consumed by Diana" and points out that Felicity Palace "functions around a nexus of luxury, excess, and spectacle" ("Homoerotic Appetites" n. pag.). The spectacle centres on disguise and gender roles which is connoted in the drawing-room performances that Diana arranges for her friends within the Sapphic circle.

At Felicity Palace, Nan loses the freedom and independence she has gained in the street as a renter and is turned into a passive object and under Diana's control. The sexual exploitation of Nan's body increases further when she is taken in as Diana Lethaby's lover. At her home, Felicity Palace, Nan participates in Diana's script and is submitted to her power. In the streets, Nan has achieved power through her off-stage performance as a man, but under Diana's roof she loses control. Whereas Nan has attempted to stifle her same-sex desire as a renter, she experiments with different modes of expression of lesbianism together with Diana, and is expected to satisfy her lesbian appetites. Diana makes her aware of the destructive effect the repression of lesbian

desire might have on her individual, "[i]t is your own sex for which you really hunger! You thought, perhaps, to stifle your own appetites: but you have only made them swell the more!", and Nan admits, "[w]hat she said was the truth: she had found out all my secrets; she had shown me to myself" (Waters, *Tipping* 249). Even though Nan lives as a boy full time, she is closer to the Victorian ideology of domesticity as she is restricted to the private realm and becomes more and more passive.

The Western idea of privacy is embedded in political theories of freedom and personal autonomy, but for lesbians the relegation of gender identity to the private sphere is an act of repression. Although Ciocia argues that Nan can express her sexuality openly ("Journeying" 12), I wish to emphasise how she can only do so within the closed sphere of Diana. In spite of consuming her lesbian sexuality Nan is entrapped within a private environment under Diana's care and control. As one feminist geographer suggests

> neglecting femme participation in the arena of queer activism consigns her sexuality and her politics to the realm of the bedroom, mirroring the traditional binary that defines public space as masculine and private space as feminine. The consignment of women to the realm of the private effaces lesbian eroticism. (Walker 75)

By turning gender roles and positions upside down Waters visualises how within the patriarchal system, the power relations in accordance to gender are culturally constructed. But, what is more Nan will not be able to fulfil her coming-out within Diana's closed sphere as her lesbian identity is limited within a the closed and private realm of Felicity Palace.

Waters states in an interview that she deliberately created different models of lesbian communities in *Tipping the Velvet* (qtd. in Hogan n. pag.). As mentioned above,

Nan must come to terms with her lesbian desire and acknowledge its centrality to her identity and she will never achieve this as Diana's lover. While Kitty offers her a closeted relationship, Diana restricts Nan to a submissive role in the enclosed and private realm of Felicity Palace where Nan is entrapped in destructive relationship framed by luxury to satisfy the sexual perversion desire of Diana. Dennis remarks that the atmosphere of Felicity Palace is permeated with "sexual tension and sense of danger" ("Homoerotic Appetites" n. pag.). Thus, as long as she is expected to comply with Diana's needs and wishes, Nan is restricted to an object of erotic desire to be consumed and displayed as an eroticised spectacle.

The objectification of her culminates when Diana arranges a costume party for her Sapphic circle and Nan performs a tableaux vivant. Not only a queering of the Victorian drawing-room performance and rupture of the private sphere, to be staged as a living picture represents the culmination of the commodification of Nan's body into an object to be consumed for the gaze of Diana's lesbian circle of aristocratic ladies, and thus also a matter of class. Dennis focuses on the politicised feature of the novel and notices that while the novel's sympathies lie with the working-class character, life together with the aristocratic Diana and "the unrestricted indulgence of pleasure . . . [presents] dangers to autonomous subjecthood" ("Homoerotic Appetites" n. pag.). Nan's seduction of Zena, the maid, on the evening of their mistress's masquerade party represents an act of revolt against Diana's commodification of her. Nan suffers the consequences of being evicted from Felicity Palace, yet this also moves the plot forwards to the final phase of Nan's coming out and lesbian self-assertion, which would never have been fulfilled within the aristocratic Sapphic community of Diana.

The third volume of the novel describes the third phase of Nan's coming-out, which represents an acknowledgment of lesbian identity. At this stage, Nan comes to

terms with her queer identity and the novel ends with a public recognition of her lesbian selfhood. In this aspect, as described by Donoghue, the third stage is reached since her individual development towards coming out is completed (*Inseparable* 160). Florence introduces her to the lesbian subculture in the socialist movement and shows Nan that there are women who are openly queer. This makes Nan realise that lesbianism is not a matter of relationship, but an identity. Donoghue points out that "[historically] lesbian culture seems to have been understood as a matter of relationships and habitual practices rather than self-identification" (*Passions* 8), and as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Faderman highlights how the emergence of lesbianism as a social group runs parallel to the rise of feminism and the concern of the status of odd women in medical discourse (237-38).

The final phase of Nan's coming-out is politically inflected and challenges the public/private dichotomy as inclusive/exclusive to offer a space of individual freedom, and as Constantini asserts,

> [a]n alternative to this binary system is the social niche inhabited by political activists, among whom Nancy finally achieves freedom. Florence and Ralph Banner, who struggle for economic, social and sexual equality, do not only herald a new age; they offer a chance for self-development for Nancy and to all the excluded whom they involve in their activities. In the third space of liberty created by their socialist circle breaks the impasse produced by the Victorians' polarised worldview. (23)

It is together with Florence that Nan will finally acquiesce her lesbian identity and complete her process of coming out. Significantly, Nan accommodates her lesbian identity within the socialist movement, which provides an egress for her lesbianism. Walker proposes that "femmes . . . function as out activists in straight spaces [as]

political rallies" (74), and Nan's theatrical skills culminate in the public performance of Ralph's speech and she gains voice and asserts agency public in sphere.

Ciocia and Wilson argue that the novel concludes with the end of Nan's theatrical career as she has come to terms with her lesbian identity. Ciocia claims that "Nan can successfully terminate her theatrical career, repudiate her stage name and reconcile herself within a newfound authentic sense of personal identity, involving a radically different attitude to the urban space" ("Journeying" n. pag.). Similarly, Wilson holds that "Nan has finally let Kitty—and the music hall theatricality associated with their relationship—go" (C A Wilson 303). Notwithstanding, assuming that Nan repeatedly uses her theatrical skills in off-stage performances and finds different ways to explore her performative talent in non-theatrical contexts, I contend that her newfound vocation within the socialist movement points towards new challenges and new modes of applying her theatrical skills in a social context.

During her performance at the social rally, Nan dazzles the audience when she delivers Ralph's speech and inspires the crowd with feminist politics. At this stage she enters the scene as a strong and powerful woman in contrast to Ralph who occupies the podium as an emasculate man. For the first time she stands before the audience performing in her own appearance, hence within the suffragist movement Nan can act on stage without recurring to male impersonation. The theatrical skills she has gained in her music hall training are applied to politics; Ralph's discourse becomes Nan's script and as she delivers the speech she takes charge of the performance.

Nelson warns for the risk of overusing Butler's theory on gender performance and the language of performativity without paying heed to its limitations, in particular regarding agency (332). Waters attributes Nan with visibility, voice and agency as she takes the stage at the political rally, and I wish to emphasise how the author engages

with recent critical work on the music-hall actress. As explored in section 3.2.1 the Victorian popular stage had turned into a site of "expression of independence and self-confidence" (Kift 47), for women towards the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Waters solves the problem of, what Nelson refers to as, "undertheorized and often problematic notions of agency" (Nelson 332), by incorporating the music-hall dynamics into the political discourse at the end of the novel. In this regard, Nan's agency ties in with Faulk's argument on the music-hall as a culture that allowed for the articulation of a female voice in the public sphere (110-12), and the view of music-hall actresses as active agents on stage (Vicinus, "New Trends" xiv; Kift 51-52). Though Nan is not politically committed personally, there are strong political undertones in her participation in the lecture on the podium, as I will develop below.

As mentioned earlier, Jagger distinguishes between theatrical performance and gender performance (21). Whereas the former is voluntary and separable from the actor, the latter is involuntary and inseparable from the gendered subject. Nevertheless, gender performance implies theatricality and when Nan acts on stage at the social rally, she effectively combines both. On one hand, the theatrical act consists in that she chooses Ralph's speech voluntarily and articulates the arguments, which are separable from her own ideas, as a script. On the other hand, gender performance is enacted through gestures, speech acts and articulations that are performed in a stylised repetition. Ciocia notes that "[the] disengaged, voyeuristic view towards the Victorian capital ensures that all kinds of troubling social issues are virtually obscured from view, or simply ignored" ("Journeying" n. pag.). In being an actor Nan enlightens the audience about social issues regarding gender inequality, which would have been obscured otherwise. Nan's on- and off-stage performance has dispossessed her of a voyeuristic view towards London, and instead she is actively participating in the urban spectacle.

Jeremiah emphasises how Waters avoids socio-political confines that restrict queer identities to a peripheral position and instead normalises it by situating lesbianism at the centre stage of the dominant culture (137). Indeed, Waters normalises lesbianism by turning lesbians into protagonists and situating same-sex desire at core of the plot. Notwithstanding, the author is also overtly political and in *Tipping the Novel* she also depicts a rather sinister and repressive image of lesbian desire. For instance, Nan has to overcome several obstacles to complete her maturation process and Kitty and Diana are two of the negative forces she must face. As discussed earlier, Kitty represents one hinder in Nan's evolution as she only offers a closeted relationship, and in doing so attempts to confine their relationship to a hidden and silenced space. Similarly, Diana's seemingly extrovert Sapphic circle is in fact repressive as it limits lesbian outlet to the private sphere. In addition, Nan is secluded to Diana's home, circle of friends and submitted to her control, which places her in an inferior position of dependence and seclusion. In this sense, Kitty and Diana represent closeted, private and hidden lesbianism that limit same-sex desire to a secluded, silenced and controlled space on the margins to heteronormative society.

I suggest that Waters is commenting on the eloquent silence that restricts and delimits lesbianism to a marginal position in society and the final phase of public acknowledgement also presents a criticism towards Jürgen Habermas's ideal of the public sphere. Habermas's notion of the public sphere foregrounds the public realm as an inclusive and discursive arena where inequalities can be bridged mainly through dialogue to discuss common interest which juxtaposes the state and civil society. In other words, the public sphere is according to Habermas composed by free individuals and is manifested in "[the s]ocial intercourse occurred in the medium of society […] in accordance of strict rules of equality and frankness, under a code of self-protection and

courteousness" (131). In this regard, the public sphere stands as "a theatre in modern society in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk […] [–] an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (Fraser 110). The major impediment of Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere is that his ideas are clearly situated within a patriarchal and heteronormative framework of the European bourgeoisie, and as a result, the ideal of the public sphere as a site of verbal interchange that bridges social differences, is limited to the interest of male, middle class and heterosexual citizens. For example, Fraser criticises Habermas for "fail[ing] to examine other nonliberal, nonbourgseois, competing public spheres" (115). Therefore, I suggest that Waters deliberately situates Nan's final stage within the realm of politics, i.e. the theatre of social discourse according to Habermas's point of view.

Symbolically, Waters concludes Nan's coming-out at a socialist rally where Nan takes control of the podium and thus appropriates a voice and exerts agency in the institutionalised arena of discursive interaction, as she steps into the public and political domain. In this regard, Waters contradicts Habermas's concept of the public sphere as all-inclusive realm and questions the discursive equality it supposedly represents. The political energy that is embedded in the novel and Waters comments both on the past and the present in her criticism of suppressive forces on public articulation of lesbianism. Hence, Waters interlocks with "two particular aspects of the music hall as a popular mode of expression: its language and meaning and the relationship between the text and audience" (Kift 5). Nan encounters Diana and faces Kitty, and her confrontation with her former lovers points towards the fact that they could only offer a liaison of unbalanced power relations and a closeted relationship respectively. In this regard, Nan's relationsship with Florence is based on equality and openness—two indispensible factors for Nan's coming-out and public assertion of lesbian identity. The

novel ends with a hint at a future within the socialist movement as a public orator, and thus, pinpoints a new use of her theatrical skills, contrary to what Ciocia and C A Wilson claim. The novel closes with Nan openly acknowledging her lesbianism "careless of whether anybody watched or not – I leaned and kissed her" (Waters, *Tipping* 472).

In chapter 4, I have argued that neo-Victorianism is a performative literary mode and *Tipping the Velvet* brings together performativity, theatricality and gender as Nan fulfils her maturation process and coming out in three phases similar to a three-act play; presentation, complication, resolution. Wilson addresses Waters's combination of performativity, theatricality and gender and argues that "the novel's structure, which charts five distinct stages in Nan's education—Whitstable, Kitty, Renting, Diana, and Florence—each marked by the assumption of a distinct, performative gender identity, even bears some similarity to a five-act drama" (C A Wilson 303). Nevertheless, the scholar does not develop her argument, and moreover, she defines three of the stages in terms of relationship to her lovers. I have argued throughout this chapter that Nan is journeying towards lesbian selfhood at a period when lesbianism was determined in terms of relationship, not as an identity, and my aim has been to link her maturation process to three phases in the coming-out progress. Although this takes place on five different stages – Whitstable, London music hall (West End), the streets (East End), Felicity Palace and the socialist rally – in my opinion the tripartite structure is clear and because of this I suggest that, in the same vein as *Nights at the Circus*, the novel resembles a three-act play: presentation, complication, resolution. Firstly, the novel clearly supports queer theories of gender performance and Waters constant references to Butlerian thoughts pinpoints her own view on gender as performative. Secondly, the novel is structured in three volumes, and I have argued that each section depicts a phase

in Nan's coming out: discovery, recognition acknowledgement. Imbued with performative spaces within and outside the theatre, on- and off-stage enactments dishevel the performativity of gender. I have affirmed that each volume is dedicated to a phase in Nan's coming out and I suggest that each level mirrors an act discovery/presentation, recognition/complication and acknowledgement/resolution. What is more, the novel's treatment of gender benefits from the performative mode of neo-Victorianism as "feminine theatrical performances simultaneously reinforce female/male relationships and provide a forum of experimentation with alternative ideas of gender and sexuality" (C A Wilson 303).

Gamble focuses on issues as doubling, mimicry, impropriety and undecidability drawing a parallel between neo-Victorian literature and drag performance (128). In this sense, neo-Victorian literature is a textual performance that entangles the reader in a dialogue with the past and by recreating the nineteenth century as a spectacle for the reader, authors hinge upon theatrical strategies. Neal remarks that *Tipping the Velvet* is densely performative proposing that:

> just as the audience in the music hall is subjected to a simultaneous 'double-reading' of the transvestite, so too is the reader of neo-Victorian literature involved in the double-reading of history. While the neo-Victorian text references, (re)visions, or is influenced by the Victorian era and the longer nineteenth century, it is also concerned with the ideological debates in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries. (56)

Thus its hybrid and performative characteristics allows for twenty- and twenty-first century to bear on the Victorian era, at the same time as it reflects over the past and the present.

The neo-Victorian genre is neither past nor present but has a unique characteristic, which originates in the gap between the past and the present. This inbetweeness gives room for impropriety, undecidability and ambiguitity. Llewellyn notes that "neither strictly about the past nor the present but a hybrid vision of their inseparability" ("Queer?" 204), by blurring the boundaries between past and present she aims at seeking out a lesbian past without losing sight of contemporary controversies regarding lesbianism ("Queer?" 213). Voigt-Virchow concurs with Llewellyn on neo-Victorianism's threshold position that "hybrid space of mimicry, camouflage and assertions of difference", but follows rather in the same lines as Gamble (112). Although Llewellyn adopts a more political posture than Voigt-Virchow, both convincingly assert that neo-Victorianism arises in its performance, as it does not exist on its own as a historical period. The destabilisation of fixed categories in gender theory can be recognised in the in-between status of neo-Victorianism as it is grounded in a hybrid space that straddles the past and the present, fact and fiction. In this same way gender identity is not a fixed or stable category that constitutes an inner essence of the body, in other words, gender does not exist in priori but it arises in its social performance.

Tipping the Velvet is overtly performative in its treatment of gender and the novel is further upgraded by the inherent performativity of the neo-Victorian literary mode. In fact, neo-Victorianism as a hybrid historical genre that straddles fact and fiction, the Victorian period and our age, arises in its performance in the same way gender is a stylised repetition of social acts. Waters retracts the Victorian period to reimagine lesbian self-identification in the past and simultaneously push a lesbian agenda. Nelson remarks that "without some notion of self-reflexivity and intentionality, [feminist geographers] would have difficulty using performativity to analyze the

production and *contestation* of heterosexualized spaces within particular spatial/temporal contexts" (Nelson 343). In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters deploys performativity to make lesbian inquiries into space, gender and identity both in the past and the present. The world of spectacle grants Waters the possibility to explore female, or rather, lesbian, voice and agency within the public sphere as well as the idea of gender as a social construct. In doing so she engages with twenty-century feminist and queer theories, especially Butler's notions of gender performance, but also Faderman's revision of lesbian historiography and Mulvey's ideas of the spectacle of the female body. Waters delves into the world of spectacle of the 1890s to tackle issues regarding space and gender and uses theatrical strategies to destabilise the public private dichotomy by attributing voice and agency to lesbian characters with the aim to normalise same-sex desire between women. Nelson notices how "the already abstracted subject embedded within performativity forecloses inquiry into agency, change and the spatiality of identity formation" (346-47), and in this regard, the process of spatialising of identity and Nan's coming-out are anchored in the music-hall culture and performativity.

Lesbianism is circumscribed by the public/private dichotomy and only accepted as long as it is confined to the private sphere. Whereas Kitty refuses to identify with other lesbians and internalise her queer desire, and thus, only offers Nan a closeted relationship, Diana keeps her hidden and entrapped within her private palace. Thus, Nan must overcome these repressive forces to assert her lesbian subjectivity. The city as a stage is used as metaphor to illustrate the difference between theatrical cross-dressing and gender performance is used as backdrop to connote the different stages in Nan's coming-out. This is fulfilled in the final stage together with Florence who embraces lesbian identity, and Nan finds "a space for conscious reflexivity, negotiation [and]

agency in the doing of idenitity" (Nelson 332). At the end of the novel, conscious subjectivity comes into play as Nan transfers music-hall theatricality into off-stage performances, and subsequently, the heroine manages to create her own space of self-fulfillment, self-reliance and self-representation in the public sphere.

5.3. Mapping Social Spaces in the City: Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002)

In previous chapters I have examined how the heroines of *Nights at the Circus* and *Tipping the Velvet* transcend the stage boundaries to continue their enactments off stage, and as a result, they turn the city into a metaphorical stage. While Carter is concerned with the spectacle of femininity, Waters engages with twenty-century gender theories regarding the performative nature of gender. Both fall clearly into the category of novels of spectacle since they evolve within the world of spectacle to regard gender issues and engage with neo-Victorian performative mode to grant female characers voice, visibility and agency. In contrast, Faber employs the trope of theatricality in a way that enhances the idea of the city as a metaphorical stage by evoking the nineteenth-century culture of urban spectacle. I will consider two of the female characters in the novel, the prostitute Sugar and the philanthropist Emmeline Fox, focusing mainly on Sugar. I will address *The Crimson Petal and the White* as a novel of spectacle to see in what way Faber represents gendered spaces and female experiences in the Victorian city. Moreover, the author places the reader in the position of an observer, and although Faber himself resists the idea that the text is voyeuristic, I will insist on the voyeuristic curiosity of the reader and draw on other scholars who emphasise the novel's visual characteristics.

The novel portrays the prostitute Sugar's ascendance on the social ladder and her movement through Victorian London, its streets and its society. Her vision of Victorian society, and insight into the social norms that underpin the public and private dichotomy enables her to, on the one hand, manoeuvre gendered restrictions and appropriate a female space within the public sphere, and, on the other hand, cross the threshold of

class difference and enter into bourgeois society. Although *The Crimson Petal and the White* is not a *Bildungsroman*, it partly depicts the maturation process of Sugar as she adapts her social performance of different female roles according to the space she occupies, and in this sense the novel connotes the process of spatialising of identity. Similarly, the widow Emmeline Fox defies the Victorian gendered ideology and cult of true womanhood through her philanthropic endeavour and participation in the public sphere that otherwise is unattainable to women of her class. This chapter focuses mainly on how socially constructed categories as space, gender and mobility converge in the female urban experience and are central constituents of the spatialising of female identity outside the patriarchal framework of womanhood. I will part from the idea that *The Crimson Petal and the White* is a canonical novel within neo-Victorianism stressing its performative features and its inherent visual quality in particular. As follows, I will consider how characters function as focalisers to narrow down my analysis to Sugar. I will look into how she envisions the city and her subjective experience of different social spaces and the different roles she performs. Then, I will consider how the philanthropist Emmeline Fox similarly destabilises the gender-inflected ideology of separate spheres engaging with the notion of the city as spectacle.

Faber has written five novels and several short stories, and up to the moment his only neo-Victorian works are *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and *The Apple: Crimson Petal Stories* (2006), the subsequent short-story collection to the novel. However, his bestseller *The Crimson Petal and the White* has been situated as a canonical text within neo-Victorian literature and received considerable critical attention since its publication a little more than a decade ago. Barbara Braid sees the novel as an example of "the neo-Victorian trend" in contemporary literature and proposes that it "aims at a re-evaluation of the Victorian period from the post-modernist

point of view" (1). I consider her remark inaccurate, though, taken that today neo-Victorianism is widely accepted as a historical subgenre in its own right rather than a trend, and in addition, it is generally acknowledged within the academia that this historical subgenre has evolved beyond postmodernism by now. As discussed in chapter 4, neo-Victorianism has its foothold in postmodern historiographic metafiction. Nevertheless, neo-Victorian fiction rather embraces than rejects literary convention of the realist mode characteristic of the Victorian novel, as well as its subgenres with their different styles and narrative structures. In fact, *The Crimson Petal and the White* even imitated nineteenth-century publication form as part of the novel was initially published in instalments in *The Guardian*.[61]

Several critics have considered *The Crimson Petal and the White* within a twenty-first critical context and attempted to position the novel on the current literary panorama. Silvia Colella, George Letissier, Heilmann and Llewellyn have identified *The Crimson Petal and the White* as a properly neo-Victorian novel highlighting structural features and narrative mode. Colella notices that, "holding on to the conventions of literary realism, the narrative pushes them even further, although eschewing (but never completely) the open disclosure of their arbitrariness" (103). Her observation is significant as it clearly situates the novel in the transition from postmodernism towards something new. Arguably, *The Crimson Petal and the White* testifies to Arias's terminology of "a move-on with a difference" ("Traces" n. pag.). Letissier calls the novel "a neo-Victorian classic" and approaches the work from three different angles to affirm that the novel refashions Victorian literary forms and

[61] In the eighteenth chapter the readers were warned that it was the last excerpt to be published as an instalment online, "Dear reader: You have arrived at the end of that portion of *The Crimson Petal and the White* which can be retrieved from cyberspace" (Faber, "Episode Eighteen" n. pag.). At the same time readers were made aware of that the novel had still not come to its close and were encouraged to buy it in book form to continue reading: "And now, dear reader, read on, in the comfort of your own bed or armchair, away from the glare of computer screens. Instead, allow your fingertips to touch the weave of that technological marvel, that miraculous concoction of vegetable fibres and dangerous chemicals - a book made of paper" (Faber, "Episode Eighteen" n. pag.).

conventions, and subsequently, confers a proper value of categorical status onto neo-Victorianism as a genre in its own right and paves the way for other authors to follow. As Letissier puts it,

> [*The Crimson Petal and the White*] gives a new slant on the nineteenth century and therefore cannot be reduced to mere replication. Then, Faber's fiction contributes to establishing a new literary canon: the neo-Victorian novel, precisely. Indeed, it encapsulates many of the ploys and devices to be found in many other rewritings of so-called Victorian classical texts. Finally, the novel also enlarges the canon through its own idiosyncrasies and specificities, by opening new tracks, as it were. (1)

This way the novel supports the idea that the contemporary return to Victorian period and pastiche of its literary forms cannot be reduced to mere nostalgia.

Heilmann and LLewellyn concur with Letissier on this point and highlight that the self-conscious metafictional mode they find so crucial to the genre "raises important questions about how contemporary neo-Victorian readers think the Victorian realist mode worked. Faber's text disappoints [readers] because it does not live up to their expectations of a (neo)Victorian novel" (13). The novel's abrupt ending with Sugar's abduction of Sophie and no clue to what will become of them provoked an extensive amount of complaints among readers. In the foreword to *The Apple* Faber defends his decision to finish the novel with an undisclosed ending was to grant Sugar the privacy she had been denied all her life and continue on her own, free from our gaze, and then adds: "[a]nd isn't it fun, at the end of a book to be challenged to do what the Victorians were obliged to do between instalments of serialised novels: construct what happens next in our imagination" (Faber, Foreword xvi). Heilmann and Llewellyn rightfully

criticise Faber for this comment affirming that "the Victorian novel itself is full of examples of postponed endings and readers left wondering" (12).

Faber defends himself asserting that "the ending of *The Crimson Petal* is not as sudden as it might first appear. Re-read the final chapters and there is a gradual process of leave-taking, a drawing of curtains, a succession of narrative farewells to each of the key characters" (Faber, Foreword xvi). Interestingly, Faber uses the metaphor of drawing curtains as characters leave the scene and this points towards the theatricality of the novel. Furthermore, he claims that the short stories in *The Apple* leaves the essential mysteries of *The Crimson Petal and the White* intact and rather offers openings than closures (Foreword xvii). Nonetheless, contrary to the author's own claims, Faber does in some way hint at possible endings and some of these short stories seem to be direct answers to letters from readers. This unavoidably reminds us of the double ending of Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and how he unwillingly was committed to rewrite the end of the novel in a way that suited the taste of the general readership. It also shows us how the Victorians stood in close contact with the readers and this is a relationship that Faber recreates.

In a brief interview Faber discusses the visual elements of the novel, and at the interviewer's remark that "the entire effect is somewhat like voyeurism—in effect gazing into a crystal ball to view another's secrets" Faber answers the following:

> I can't agree that the effect is one of voyeurism. Voyeurism implies that you're watching something from a safe distance, with no emotional involvement required of you. *The Crimson Petal* is a very moral and humane book, not in the least flippant or insincere. Voyeurism is spiritually cold and I try my best to give all my work genuine warmth. (*Bookbrowse* n. pag.)

Although Faber discards the voyeuristic quality of his novel, it is undeniably present and I suggest that the author's image of the reader is too idealistic. The reader does not necessarily get emotionally involved in the narrative, while probably all readers do feel a voyeuristic curiosity to peep into the secret lives of the Victorians for different reasons. I have argued in chapter 4 that neo-Victorian literature engages with the voyeuristic interest in the Victorian era and the performative mode provides a prolific space to exploration of gender issues. Kohlke, Llewellyn, Boehm-Schnitker, Gruss and Perticaroli have drawn attention to the voyeuristic features of *The Crimson Petal and the White*, and all of them convincingly argue for the contemporary reader's desire to scrutinise the private lives of the Victorians.

Kohlke suggests that neo-Victorianism is "the new Orientalism" ("Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 12), and with that she means that reading neo-Victorian literature is a way for us to explore our own sexual desire by investing the Victorian sexscape and underworld with our own sexuality. She plays with the idea that the neo-Victorian power of attraction reveals our own voyeuristic desire to delve into the Victorian sexual double standard and as a result offers a titillating reader experience. Similarly, Llewellyn links neo-Victorian voyeurism to our own curiosity of obtaining the secret lives of the Other Victorians:

> Faber, I suggest, enacts a (potentially) deliberate tension between the contemporary reader's voyeuristic desire to "know" the seedier lives of those well-known "Other" Victorians through imitation of the female sexual subject's voice and the early twenty-first century writer's desire to subvert, re-invent and challenge hegemonic social claims of the nineteenth-century realist mode. ("Authenticity, Authority and the Author" 187)

Ironically, Llewellyn's remark does not only point at the reader's voyeuristic desire to find out "the truth", but also holds Faber responsible for attributing this visual characteristic to the novel, which of course contradicts Faber's own argument cited above. In fact, I would even propose that the author is entrapped in a spectorial field of observation and objectification himself because he writes about private and intimate matters, and consequently commercialises and commodifies the Victorian Other for the contemporary reading public.

In this vein, Boehm-Schnikter and Gruss highlight how the narrator from the opening lines "lures [the] readers into a story constructed by contemporary visual regimes, such as the adventure game or the virtual (tourist) tour, and plays with readers'/consumers' voyeurism and desire for vicarious entertainment" (5). Perticaroli concurs with Boehm-Schnikter and Gruss on this point as he approaches *The Crimson Petal and the White* from the perspective of contemporary culture's commodification of the past, proposing that the contemporary interest in cultural practices of historiography has been fuelled by "the consumers' gaze" (11). The scholar points out that Faber's narrative evokes the rhetoric of consumption simultaneously as the text undermines the reciprocity between subjects and objects (Perticaroli 117). There is a pronounced ambiguity in the treatment of gender in *The Crimson Petal and the White*. Faber appeals to the reader's emotions by offering a human portrayal of the prostitute Sugar, hence, he criticises both Victorian and contemporary objectification of women, prostitutes in particular. Notwithstanding, he commercialises Sugar himself by simultaneously turning her into an object for the reader's gaze. Independently of Fabers's original attention, I concur with Kohlke, Llewellyn, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss that *The Crimson Petal and the White* is a densely voyeuristic text.

The performativity of the novel is grounded in the visual structure of the narrative and the self-conscious metafictional mode that places the reader in the position of a spectator who watches a performance. *The Crimson Petal and the White* even resembles a theatrical performance, and bringing the marked visual features and articulation of voices of previously silenced together with the view of the city as a theatre, the text is arguably a novel of spectacle. Heilmann and Llewellyn emphasise the (meta)fictionality of the narrative likening it to a game-playing that makes constant comments on the reader's peripheral position to the historical period, Victorian society and the narrative itself (14-15). The narrator repeatedly makes metafictional asides to remind the reader of the artificiality of the text and of our position as outsiders, as for example in the catchphrase "Watch your step!" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 3), which is repeated throughout the entire novel. Llewellyn identifies the narrative voice as male noticing that "the omniscient narrator, . . . is decidedly male and has a mimetic relationship to the Victorian patriarch or all seeing/knowing 'I' of classic realism" ("Authenticity, Authority and the Author" 188). In addition to this, I find that shifting focalisation according to male and female characters is crucial to the text because it offers a multi-layered perspective that includes both male and female viewpoints.

Boemh-Schnitker and Gruss highlights that the "visual setup is structured by the focalisation of the characters in the game . . . [and] the reader moves through the story by following guides offered by the script, the narrator and the characters" (5). The plot moves forward as the reader is carried along Victorian society as seen through the eyes of different characters and I will liken this to the perspective of the *flâneur*. Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss acknowledge that "[t]he narrative play on distances in Faber's novel entails calibrations of how readers can 'see' or picture the scenes characters [describe]" (6); however, they fail to recognise the similarities between the reader

perspective and practice of *flânerie*—a relationship I will attempt to analyse in this chapter. I will analyse two female characters, Sugar and Emmeline Fox, as they enjoy the privilege of moving both within the public and the private spheres as well as traversing the social strata of Victorian society.

In chapter 4, I have affirmed that the novel's opening lines illustrate the neo-Victorian metafictional and performative mode, and in addition to this I wish to point out that this is also the starting point of a walk in which the narrator will lead the reader through the streets of the lower areas of London. Passing down Church Line, St Giles – a notorious slum area of nineteenth-century London – the reader is able to approach the city from the point of view of a *flâneur*. Tester emphasises that "the *flâneur* is the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city. Consequently, *flânerie* can, after Baudelaire, be understood as the activity of the souverign spectator going about the city in order to find the things that will occupy his gaze" (7). The reader observes the city and its characters from a distance without interfering in what happens in the urban scene. As Brand argues, "readers [obtain] a 'safe' imaginative exposure to urban curiosities without the necessity of exposure to the dangers and difficulties normally involved in observing them" (28). Moreover, the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator insists from the beginning "[t]he truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 3). Historically detached from the Victorian city the readers enjoy a safe distance from which they are permitted to gaze at the performance displayed in the novel in a *flâneur*-like manner. Hence, readers are enabled to approach the neo-Victorian city itself as a text as they are taken along the streets. Faber engages with this idea as he compares the urban panorama to a text: "It's an ashen hour of night, blackish-grey and almost readable like undisturbed pages of a burnt manuscript" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 4).

As mentioned above, the narrative is focalised through different characters who carry the reader's gaze offering the opportunity to peep into nineteenth-century society and the secret lives of the Victorians as they move around the city. Faber conceives the urban panorama of Victorian London both as a spectacle and a text. As de Certeau stresses, the city when seen from above situates the observer in a detached position that:

> transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was possessed 'into a text before one's eyes It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. (92)

In this regard, the textual representation of London in neo-Victorian novel recasts the reader-as-observer to a *flâneur.*

Sugar's fulfilment of different social roles together with the interpretation of and interaction with London in terms of theatricality is demarcated by the spatial production of perceived-conceived-lived space in the city. Faber's description of the city as spectacle testifies to Lefebvre's notion of triadic social space, and this is illustrated when the two prostitutes Caroline and Sugar traverse the city. First, they cross invisible boundaries while they are "walking together through a maze of streets . . . already marked for destruction by town planners dreaming of a wide avenue named after the Earl of Shaftesbury" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 33). Then they engage in a theatrical social act buying pastry in shop which is suggestive of the inherent performativity of London life discussed in section 2.2.1.:"'In the same scoop maydames?' the shop-keeper, aware that they're as much ladies as he's a Frenchman, leers smarmily" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 33). Whereas the first excerpt makes reference to how urban space is conceived and mapped out by urban planners in contrast to the pedestrians' practical

usage of the city at street level. In this regard, the second quote shows how space is made functional through the practices of everyday-life and here Caroline and Sugar engage with the inherent theatricality of London. Finally, the two women move "[o]nwards . . . to the next amusement [to] Trafalgar Square" where they will observe the city scene as if watching a theatrical performance in a true *flâneur*-like fashion and the author represents the scene as an urban spectacle (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 33).

Faber incorporates this in the beginning of the novel, and the rest of the narrative is underpinned by this structure as the characters make practical function of social space. In this regard, I am concerned with the female characters' interaction with the city. Feminist geographers have argued that

> [w]omen's daily lives are shaped by the cities in which they live . . . Simultaneously, women construct the material, social and symbolic circumstances", which in other words is a process of spatializing identities and consequently, "urban places are not simply containers within women which women organize their daily lives. (212)

Therefore, I will focus on how two female characters different approach of public and private spaces in an attempt to find out how this contributes to their identities.

Through the character of Sugar, readers are introduced to nineteenth-century London society and gain insight into different spaces and cultural spheres. Her awareness of the performativity of class identity will enable her to enact different roles at different levels of society, from common prostitute to kept mistress, governess and finally single caretaker. This is reflected in her skills to cross boundaries by means of theatrical devices, which consequently destabilises the public/private dichotomy. In their essay "Feminist Geographies of the 'City': Multiple Voices, Multiple Meanings", Valerie Preston and Ebru Usundag assert that "[w]e have more complex and dynamic

readings of gender that recognize how men's and women's multiple identities intersect in place-specific ways" (216). The critics suggest that space and gender are central to the social construction of identity, a notion I have referred to as "spatializing of identity" in section 2.1. Sugar performs different social roles according to different spaces, both public and private, and her insight into the social organisation of space enables her to move freely both within the domestic sphere and the public realm.

I will examine in what way space and gender contribute to Sugar's subjective identity as she is granted both physical and social mobility while she moves through the city transgressing the limits between the public and the private realms. Up to the moment I have argued that gender and space are socially constructed and converge in the spatialising of identities. In previous chapters I have focused on how the world of spectacle provides a social space where gender is perceived, conceived and lived through acts of performance. Preston and Ustundag adds a third category to space and gender, claiming that "mobility is socially constructed. Movements across space reflect the inter-relations between available resources and social identities" (218). Indeed, gendered constraints do not only concern disequilibrium of presence and participation in the public realm, but also conditions imposed on mobility within the public sphere and between the public and the private. As argued in the section entitled "Space and Gender in Victorian Culture" (2.2.2.), the public/private dichotomy was ideologically infiltrated by bourgeois values that relegated women to the domestic realm under the social system of patriarchy. In subsequent chapters I have insisted on the porosity of this binary ideology and contended that present-day readers often wrongfully associate women with the total exclusion from the public sphere. Conversely, as noted by Vicinus, Walkowitz and Epstein Nord, and explored in section 3.1.1. this gender-connoted spatial division was constantly being challenged and transgressed by women

who rallied into the public sphere. Preston and Ustundag assert that "[w]omen's identities are articulated in relation to other identities through spatial practice in specific urban plaices" (212), and in this context Sugar turns different places into metaphorical stages for social performances, and thus, recreates the social production of space according to theatricality and performativity. Her ability to transgress gender-inflected spatial limits pinpoints space, gender and mobility as social constructs.

Twenty-century feminist theory have focused on the performative nature of gender, and as argued in previous chapters, Butlerian thought regarding gender and gender identity takes previous feminist criticism that approaches womanhood as socially constructed to the next level claiming that gender identity arises in its performance, i.e. a stylised repetition of social acts. Faber's treatment of Sugar bears on theatricality as Sugar transgresses the social boundaries of the urban panorama and performs different roles according to the social space she occupies at each instant. Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Every-Day Life* (1959) conceived human social interaction in terms of theatricality and the sociologist applied the metaphor of "life as a theatre" in which we perform different social roles. Goffman suggests that

> performance is, in a sense, 'socialized,' moulded and modified to fit into the understanding of expectations of the society in which it is presented. We consider here another important aspect of this socialisation process—the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that idealized in several different ways. (22)

Sugar performs different social roles that were available to Victorian women taking on the roles of prostitute, mistress and governess to finally turn into a single mother. Her ability to shift between different roles is indebted to her insight into the wide spectrum of social classes and their corresponding figures—she knows how to seduce men,

follow social decorum and to be submissive. Nevertheless, Sugar's theatrical role-playing is not the expression of a prior identity, as viewed by Goffman who applies the metaphor *Theatrum Mundi* in which people are both conscious of being actors and produce different social roles to present the performing self.

Contrarily, her enactments are performative in the Butlerian sense, i.e. her gender identity arises in performance and therefore, the roles she performs contribute to her identity, not the other way around. As Jagger notes, "Butler rejects the very idea of such a self and the view that gender acts are expressive of a core identity" (23). Gender identity originates in its performance, and moreover, social space is central to subjective selfhood as culturally imposed restraints and limitations condition individual social enactments. Contrary to Goffman's concept of a predetermined identity that is enacted in different social roles, I contend that Sugar performs different social roles according to Butler's performative theory and space fulfils a central function to her subjective experience of the city and is a fundamental to the development of identity.

Ardener remarks that space is a key dimension to gender studies and she holds that, "a restricted area like a club, a theatre or a nation-state has a set of rules to determine how its boundary shall be crossed and who shall occupy that space. Those who enter it will share certain defining features . . . [, meet] specific criteria. . . . In some way they must be recognized" (Ardener, "Ground Rules for Social Maps" 1). Ardener's reference to club, theatre and nation-state in the excerpt pinpoints the social and performative characteristic of space as socially produced and performative, and hence, spatialising of identities suggests that gender identity is concerned with how different social roles contribute to identity. I will take a close look at how socially constructed categories space, gender and mobility intertwine in Faber's representation of London, and examine how Sugar deploys theatrical strategies to acquire physical and

social mobility and asserts agency in the process. I aim to prove that her passage through different social spaces and her roles as prostitute, kept mistress and governess bestow a spatialised identity to her character and finally her accumulated experience culminates in her role as a single mother.

At the first stage of her career, Sugar is a street performer in her role as a prostitute. Sugar becomes an actress as she performs her sexual desire by participating in what in Irigarayan terms would be labelled as male-scripted roles, namely acting out a male fantasy of female desire (Palmer, "Gender as Performance" 26). However, Sugar's performance expands beyond her profession. As a city dweller, she forms part of London's urban street spectacle, where the roles of actor and spectator are interchangeable. Sugar turns from actor into spectator as she interacts with the city. However, Faber's treatment of the city as spectacle does not engage with the notion of carnivalesque and gender performance, as do Carter and Waters in *Nights at the Circus* and *Tipping the Velvet* respectively. Instead, Faber employs the idea of the city as a stage as explored in section 2.2.1. utilising the trope of theatricality and as Sugar observes the city spectacle she embodies the figure of the *flâneuse*.

I have previously argued that the possibility of a female counterpart of the *flâneur*, the male urban stroller who rejoices in observing the urban scene from his privileged anonymous or detached position, has been questioned, challenged and even discarded by scholars since late twentieth century. Mainly because the nineteenth-century *flâneur* could access the streets on terms that were unavailable to women, and moreover takes visual possession of the urban crowd as he objectifies it with his male gaze. However, as Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough contend,

> the critical question around the *flâneuse* was not simply one of her absolute non-existence, but one of her occlusion from a patriarchal discourse on the modern

> city. Gender, that is, would need to be seen as mapped not *only to* the divide between the public and the private, but also *across* it. (4)

I have argued that the *flâneuse* was possible suggesting that we need to consider this female urban stroller on terms of her own as her accessibility to the public sphere was circumscribed by her sex. A female-specific consciousness was therefore necessary for women to stroll the urban panorama and behold city life as if watching a performance. In *The Crimson Petal and the White* the reader's gaze is carried along London society through different characters and Sugar performs the role of a *flâneuse* as she observes scenes from daily life in the city. As she both beholds the city from a distance and interacts with it she moves across Victorian society, and in doing so, maps out gendered spaces in the city.

One example of this is the moment she settles down at Trafalgar Square to enjoy the spectacle of the passing crowd on the urban panorama. Even though her identity as a prostitute is recognisable she is the one doing the observing, as she watches the passers-by from a distance. Thus the following passage represents an instance of *flânerie* in which Sugar becomes a *flâneuse* gazing at the London stage and interpreting what occurs on the theatrical scene:

> Onwards now to the next amusement. As they approach Trafalgar Square – what excellent timing – the fun has just begun. The unseen colossus of Charing Cross station has discharged its most copious load of passengers for the day, and that flood of humanity is advancing through the streets. … So these clerks swarming before her cannot be undertakers anymore; what can they be? (Of course the banal truth is that they're clerks – but won't do: no one ever escaped into a better life without the aid of imagination.) So … they're an enormous party of dinner

> guests evacuating a palatial hotel, that's what they are! An alarm has been raised: Fire! Flood! Every man for himself! (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 34)

Sugar observes the episode as if watching a performance and like the audience enjoying a spectacle. Brand argues that '[the *flâneur*s] would present themselves reading these crowds as if they were reading the most innocuous and diverting texts. In order to produce this effect, they would claim to possess extraordinary powers of interpretation' (6). Similarly, de Certeau proposes that walking the city has its own rhetoric which he refers to as "texturology", as urban citizens make the cityscape legible as he turns the streets into a transparent text, and as a result imposes order on the bustling crowd (92-93). In the excerpt above, Sugar turns into a *flâneuse* while beholding the urban panorama from the margins to transform it into a theatrical act. Moreover, as a marginalised citizen she is obliged to watch from a distance, and neo-Victorian fiction by voicing the unheard and providing an account of minorities, opens the curtain for the prostitute and permits her entrance onto the city stage in the role of *flâneuse*.

The *flâneur* is not a fixed identity but a temporary role performed by the spectator. Hence, the prostitute can also enjoy instances of *flânerie* while she is present on the urban scene. I have argued that the male *flâneur* enjoyed a peripheral position and perceived the city as entertainment, in change Sugar watches urban society up closely simultaneously as her status as a prostitute situates her in the social peripheral. I would even suggest that to deny the possibility of a *flâneuse* would be to neglect that women walk in urban environments, and what is more, ignore that women watch their surroundings and attempt to make sense of the cityscape and their roles within it in the process. Arias remarks that Sugar, although not fitting the term of a bohemian *flâneur* generally associated with nineteenth-century Paris, several characteristics of the modern urban stroller can be attributed to her ("Urban Stroller" n. pag.). Sugar traverses the city

as she walks the streets and move between different urban sites, and as Fenster points out "the act of walking in the city is what marks territorialisation and appropriation and the meanings given to a space" (243). Thus by walking and participating in urban life, women appropriate a female space within the public realm. Moreover, through the act of *flânerie*, which is possibly due to a gendered consciousness of her social position, women apply different strategies to gain mobility in the public sphere subsequently render a female vision of the city.

One of the many features that make Sugar a remarkable prostitute in comparison to the other women in the trade at St Giles is her concern for wearing expensive dresses according to ladies' fashion, as well as the habit of wearing gloves: "ladies must wear them at all times, until safely indoors. Sugar dresses like a lady, therefore she must on no account bare her extremis in public" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 46). Even though one reason for covering her hands is to protect her dry and flaky skin condition, her ladylike dressing habits grants her freedom to move at easy along the streets and traverse the boundaries between class-divided areas. While Caroline is limited to the notorious slum areas of London, Sugar's apparel enables her to stroll along "the great open space, the grandiose vacancy of Regent Street" or "idle along the Stretch" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 46-47). In a metafictional aside, the narrator interrupts the reader's gaze following Sugar along her walk "Leave Sugar to herself now; she longs to walk alone, anonymous" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 47). Sugar is conscious of her vulnerable position as a woman in public and as a prostitute, hence her way of dressing which allows her to cross the invisible borders that separate the slums from the better-off areas. Moreover, she adapts a different pace in accordance with each area in order to attain the possibility to roam free in the city. Pollock draws on de Certeau's rhetoric of walking in her affirmation that pedestrians:

> traverse, negotiate and transgress the official structures and ideologies of the social world, and towards a conception of the city as an imagined environment – that is, a real physical environment always perceived through the prevailing discourses *about* the city . . . urban practises of negotiating public space (and gender ideology) become visible, including, of course, the lives and peregrinations of women in the city. (26)

Sugar's cross-class dressing and leisured pace pinpoint her knowledge regarding the cultural values that condition social practices and movement. The city offers an escape for Sugar from the slums, where she instead can walk the streets unsolicited and retrieve a subjective experience. In other words, her undisturbed walks in the public sphere entail an inward journey that generates privacy, and thus, Sugar manages to appropriate a female and a private space within the public realm, and as Wolff notes, "the producer is herself shaped within a spatially orchestrated social structure which is lived at both psychic and social levels" (Foreword 66).

In section 3.1.1. I have argued that women needed a gender-specific consciousness to access the streets and some of the strategies mentioned are pace and disguise. Whereas the nineteenth-century journalists Flora Tristan and George Sand cross-dressed in order to walk the streets (a strategy applied by Sarah Waters to permit Nan to take possession of the streets in *Tipping the Velvet*), Sugar adopts cross-class disguise. The narrator's remark places a stress on her individual experience, and this connotes that sight, movement and space intertwine in Sugar's subjectivity during her urban walks. Fenster stresses how "the intimate corporeal experience of everyday walking" attributes a sense of belonging that is anchored in the pedestrian's individual "spatial knowledge of environments" (243). In this sense, Sugar's wide knowledge of several public spaces, and resistance to adapt to the specific habits and modes of the

slums, suggest that she does not feel at home in the rookeries or in her role as a prostitute. Instead she aspires for something different and we will see how her identity is shaped and develops according to different spaces.

Sugar's second stage on the social ladder takes her away from the poor areas of London. In becoming William's mistress she is kept in a private apartment in a middle-class area. In her role as William's lover she continues to stage her desire, however, now her audience is reduced to one particular spectator. From being a street artist, Sugar turns into a drawing-room performer. Wilson suggests that women staged their accomplishments in drawing-room performances in order to attract suitable husbands and gain financial security (C A Wilson 291). Sugar's performance as William's mistress is aimed at establishing her social and financial security. Whereas the harlot's progress was downward in Victorian culture, in neo-Victorian literature the movement is reversed and Sugar fulfils the myth of the harlot's progress by moving upward the social ladder.

Space, as place, is not a mere backdrop to the every-day practices and routines of women, but is a fundamental dimension in spatialising identities. When William turns Sugar into his mistress and sets up an apartment for her, he simultaneously subjects her to his control and narrows down her space to a closed domestic realm. Although she has been retrieved from the squalor, filth and abuse of the former life Sugar also loses the independence and freedom of movement and she finds it difficult to adapt:

> On the first night when she was first given these rooms, she felt as if she'd been allotted a little corner of Paradise. The slate was wiped clean, and she was determined to savour *everything* in her new life – the solitude, the silence, the

> freedom of filth, the fresh air, her little garden, walks in leafy Priory Close, meals in the best hotels. (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 309)

Sugar is not familiar with the unobtrusive environment of suburbia and the silence and "the sepulchral stillness of suburbia" unnerves her rather than gives her comfort as she lives secluded in her small apartment that is "fenced by iron peaks" (309).

Sugar manages to break free from a life in the streets and has a private place for her and William, notwithstanding, she is bored by spending all day waiting for him to visit and worries that she will lose his favour. Therefore she takes up her former habit of walking the streets, although not in the context of soliciting, with the purpose to observe William. She is determined to get to know her lover thoroughly and sets out to follow him. Sugar changes from a *flâneuse* into a stroller with a thesis. Iain Sinclair argues that the *flâneur* has been replaced by the stalker. In contrast to the *flâneur* who idles around in the city without a purpose, the stalker walks with a thesis – aware of where he is going although not necessarily in knowledge of why or how (qtd. in Hartung 154). Sugar stalks the Rackhams by following and observing them from a distance because "[she] is convinced that if she can only share the Rackhams' public life – see what they see, hear what they hear – she's bound to share their private life as well" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 398). While spying on the Rackhams, Sugar becomes both a performer and a spectator simultaneously. In order to move around freely and unnoticed among the upper classes, she adopts the disguise of a lady: '[a]nxious to attract as little attention as possible, Sugar has adopted a strict policy of sober dress. . . . Everyone calls her "madame", and cabbies help her dismount as if she might snap her ankles on the unaccustomed hardness of the streets' (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 393). Sugar blends in among the crowd of the upper-class areas by using disguise and moving in a ladylike fashion. Whereas the upper classes traverse class boundaries by interacting with the

poor in the slums, Sugar makes the opposite movement when she walks along the wealthy areas of London. In order to move freely and not to stand out in the crowd she adopts a cross-class masquerade to fit in and gain anonymity. Garber notices "cross-dressing is a classic strategy of disappearance in detective fiction" (186), and Sugar dresses above her social status to blend into the accommodated classes. This was a common device applied by slumming journalists in the nineteenth century. For instance, the American reporter Elizabeth Banks used this method by disguising herself as a servant in the households of the rich (Koven 140–42). Sugar's awareness of the cross-class potential of dressing permits her to melt into society unnoticed and watch it closely from a privileged place by means of disguise. She stages her character so trustworthy that other people fail to see beyond her performance. Yet, Sugar's trained gaze easily recognises the outsiders among the crowd:

> It's most peculiar, this respectability; especially since, wherever she follows the Rackhams, she's by no means the only whore in the crowd. Theatres, opera houses, sporting fields and pleasure gardens are favourite haunts of the better-class harlots during the Season, and there's no shortage of stray gentlemen loitering on balconies and behind marquees wishing to be rescued from boredom. (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 393)

The fact that prostitutes move freely and publicly at the theatre emphasises the Victorian sexual double standards. Not only was there a market for this trade, but people were well aware of its presence.

The nineteenth-century physician William Acton (1813–75) who became famous for his writings on prostitution recognised that the English habit of dealing with prostitution was basically to ignore its existence (Marcus 2–3). The sex trade and pornography flourished in the nineteenth century despite the Victorians' reputation of

being sexually repressed. Nevertheless, as we contemplate sexual exploitation in the past and denounce the mistreatment of human beings, we seem to forget about its existence today. Kohlke argues that

> an uncanny doubling and intensification of the prevalent Victorian social problems, [indicates] a return of the repressed rather than 'progress'. Neo-Victorian fiction's project of the retrospective sexual liberation of the nineteenth century becomes disturbingly infused with preferred ignorance – or deliberate denial – of our own culture's complicity in free market systems that enable continuing sexual exploitation and oppression. ("Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 2–3)

Faber's treatment of Sugar in *The Crimson Petal and the White* reveals a highly gifted young woman who has a talent for conversation, writing and advertising among other things. Sugar is, in other words, a truly neo-Victorian prostitute as described by The Little Professor: she possesses unusual and hidden skill and has a heart of gold, as will be explained later (Burstein, "Rules" n. pag.). This makes readers sympathise with Sugar while simultaneously, as noted by Kohlke, readers turn a blind eye to sex trade and abuse in our own age, which points at our own double moral.

Sugar's writing skill appears in the form of a novel in which Sugar vents her rage against the sex buyers who exploit her: *"There's a new century coming soon, and you and you kind will be DEAD!*" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 185). Braid suggests that these lines illustrate how "Sugar sees herself as a herald of a new era for women" (3). Although I would not argue that Sugar is a proto-feminist, her thoughts are arguably reminiscent of Carter's *Nights at the Circus,* which is set at the turn of the nineteenth century on the brink to "the New Age in which no women will be bound to the ground" (Carter 25). Although Faber does not share Carter's highly politicised feminist agenda, he does defend women's vulnerable position and is concerned with attributing human

value to the prostitute. The author acknowledges that he maintained correspondence with prostitutes who actually claimed that they were Sugar and had been marvelled by his ability to represent the way they felt about customers (Faber, Foreword xv). Faber's reference to coming "new century" and Carter's promise of a "New Age" both hint at a new era of radical change for women in which things will be different and better. By turning a Victorian fallen woman into the protagonist of the novel Faber manages to draw attention to the human side of prostitutes, and in a true neo-Victorian fashion it poses a self-reflective stance as illegal prostitution, sex tourism and trafficking continue today.[62]

In the third stage in Sugar's progress, she becomes a member of the Rackhams' residence as governess to William's daughter, Sophie Rackham. In her role as an educator and caretaker of Sophie, Sugar enters the private sphere of the Rackhams and her position as a governess turns her from fallen angel into angel in the house. Braid points out that "the representation of women in Victorian culture [was] far from homogeneous. A woman [could] be a 'madonna' or a 'magdalene', an angel or a monster, and she could transform from one to another instantaneously" (2). This implies that a woman's sexuality was bound up with her social roles. When Sugar enters William's private sphere their relationship alters in several ways. Nevertheless, Sugar continues acting and uses the theatrical skills she has acquired as a prostitute to manipulate her master while pretending to be as submissive as any angel in the house (Braid 3).

Up to the moment Sugar has risen from common prostitute to kept mistress, with a subsequent spatial movement from the rookeries to respectable area and her third role

[62]Although it is not my focus here, Louisa Yates offers an interesting reading of the family unit in *The Crimson Petal and the White* examining how Faber creates an alternative Victorian family. Yates argues that married heterosexual men are represented as a major threat to children and suggest that Faber's constant references to pre-adolescent prostitutes and contemporary societal anxieties of child abuse (108-09).

as governess situates her immediately at the bosom of a bourgeois home. Louisa Yates regards Sugar's position in relation to Victorian family structure claiming:

> [her] social roles – prostitute, mistress and working-class woman – bar her from entering this familial model though [sic] a marriage to William Rackham. Sugar instinctively knows that any attempt to pursue 'traditional' paths into marriage would only lead to her expulsion. (111)

Yates's remark illustrates how Sugar withholds a marginal social position independent of her improved situation. She is able to transgress class boundaries and spatial limits, yet she cannot rise above her social rank.

The governess held an inbetween situation in Victorian society as she straddled a social position between the leisured and the working classes. Contrary to what Yates remarks in the passage, the governess did not come from the working classes. Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros explains how the governess normally came from the middle classes and her ambiguous character clearly situated her in a grey zone between the working-class servants and middle-class members of the household, in Wadsö Lecaros's words: "she was a wage-earning middle-class woman in a society in which middle-class femininity was defined by domesticity and non-participation in the public labour market . . . [and] was paid to perform those tasks which were said to constitute a woman's mission" (13). Thus, Sugar's progress in society maintains her in the lower ranks of the class stratum. She escapes prostitution but continues to be a liminal figure in her role as governess; when she crosses the threshold of the Rackham's residence to take position as a governess she situates herself in an in-between situation, being neither a domestic servant nor a member of the family.

As a governess, Sugar is in charge of the care and education of Sophie, William's neglected daughter, and as a result she performs roles associated with

femininity and maternal instinct, and Sugar develops a strong emotional bond to Sophie Rackham. While Agnes is a mixture between a parodic version of the angel in the house and a mad women in the attic, Sugar discovers a new side as caretaker and surrogate mother to Sophie.

Yates notices that the Rackham home is carefully mapped out according to delineated spaces belonging to different family members suiting their different roles within the bourgeois household (111). Sugar, the governess, is restricted to the quarters close to the domestic service and the nursery where she spend the days together with Sophie. Wadsö Lecaros stresses how the governess's marginalised position as a wage-earning working woman impeded her full involvement in the bourgeois home; while she carried out tasks that were properly feminine and granted access to family spaces as the drawing-room, nevertheless, she was excluded from the social sphere of the family unit (254). Sugar occupies an in-between social position in her role as a governess, and as a liminal figure she knows how to traverse the spatial and social borders unnoticed. Her initial aim to enter the Rackham household it to get closer to William, notwithstanding she unexpectedly establishes an emotional bond to her pupil. The patriarchal home, Cheapstowe Villa in particular, is a destructive and repressive space for women and Sugar also learns that the role of William's wife is unattainable for her. It is noteworthy how Sugar's roles as prostitute, mistress and governess allocate her to spaces that albeit being intimate, private or domestic always represent a workplace for her. Ironically, she finally comes to terms with her identity during her time as a governess; in this third stage she encounters her proper role but not her proper sphere.

As the novel is ending, Sugar abandons William, taking his daughter with her. When part of Sugar's novel is found he is horrified to discover that she had a hidden side. Immediately, he turns her into a monster reinterpreting what he used to find

charming about Sugar as proof of her grotesque nature as a fallen woman: 'What was he thinking of, to take this for an arousing bit of tomfoolery, an erotic frolic, when any fool could recognise it as the bestial cavortings of a monster!' (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 876). To the deception of many readers, *The Crimson Petal and the White* ends abruptly without any kind of epilogue and the last the reader sees of Sugar is how she steps off the scene together with Sophie, prepared for her new role as a single mother. The different spaces and social roles performed throughout the novel contribute to the process of self-discovery and development of a subjective identity—her subjective experience and mobility between public/private spaces as well as the different social roles performed in different social spaces all conduct Sugar towards her final role as a single mother.

Braid has juxtaposed Sugar and Agnes as they embody two polarised images of Victorian angels, i.e. the fallen angel and the angel in the house respectively (2-3). Sugar and Agnes are connected at several levels—as William's mistress and wife, Sophie's mother and surrogate mother and they live under the same roof occupying different domestic spaces that are aligned to their social roles. Sugar bridges the gaps that separate them enacting the role of her guardian angel and Sugar helps Agnes escape the patriarchal control represented by William and Dr Curlew. Similarly, she escapes subordination to male control herself and rescues Sophie from the dysfunctional family of the Rackham household. Yates proposes that "the pairing of Sugar and Sophie as governess and pupil unites the two contrasting groups of children" of the child prostitute and inconvenient child (111). Sugar provokes an abortion when she becomes pregnant and Yates links this to Sugar's awareness that she cannot pursue a marriage to William (111). Nonetheless, what her relationship to Sophie and discovery of empathy and love also makes her realise is that the dysfunctional Rackham household does not

offer the possibility of a good future for any woman. After Agnes fakes death, William takes Sugar and Sophie to a studio for a family photograph. However the photograph is manipulated and Agnes's face is superimposed on Sugar's head. Braid argues that the representation of Agnes and Sugar as angels or monster depends on William's perspective (5). Ironically, William creates his own monster when he, in an attempt to recreate a perfect woman, combines Agnes's continuance with Sugar's body: the disembodied Angel in the House and the eroticised and carnal prostitute. In doing so, he creates a distorted and grotesque picture in the photograph by merging two women into one.

The prostitute figures prominently in neo-Victorian fiction as a liminal woman who defies the binary opposition we generally associate with the Victorian period as she embodies stereotyped ideas of double moral standards, repressed sexuality and contradiction between public life and private selves. Moreover, she is a public woman par excellence thus represents the direct opposite to the domesticated ideal of femininity. Similarly, the philanthropist challenges the restriction of women to domestic spaces, and as argued previously, the social and spatial patterns of the prostitute and the female charity worker often overlap. However, the figure of the philanthropist is scarce in neo-Victorian literature and with the exception from the feminist Fido Faithful in Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* (2009),[63] Faber's Emmeline Fox is one of the few neo-Victorian philanthropists that has a central role in the narrative. Still, as I will argue, Faber does not explore her character fully.

Emmeline Fox, the female philanthropist and new-woman figure in *The Crimson Petal and the White,* adds a second complementary character to Sugar. In section 3.1.1. I have carried out a socio-historical examination of the prostitute and the philanthropist

[63] See my article "'Not the Kind of Thing Anyone Wants to Spell Out': Lesbian Silence in Emma Donoghue's Neo-Victorian Representation of the Codrington Divorce".

and I find that these two urban figures benefit from a parallel reading as their paths intertwine. I have approached these urban figures as liminal characters who attain urban mobility in the performance of different social roles. According to Wendy Parkins "new women's spatio-temporal location as 'in-between' occupying a liminal space between a patriarchal past and a yet-to-be realised feminist future" (92). I will focus on Emmeline Fox as a liminal figure who challenges the gendered division of the public and the private. My main aim is to find out how Mrs Fox's subjective experience of the city contributes to her identity, i.e spatialising of identity. Both participate actively in the public realm and although their social roles are different they occupy the same social space. I have chosen to adapt the angle of *flânerie* to analyse how these female figures make sense of the cityscape and roles in society to finally see how their urban experience contribute to their identities.

The widowed and childless Emmeline Fox has found a new life of self-realisation within the Rescue Society. Philanthropy was one of the few public activities available for middle-class women as the role of charity worker was underpinned by qualities linked to femininity in the Victorian era, as for example, self-sacrifice, moral and spiritual guidance. In fact philanthropy and charity work were condoned activities as they represented a solution to the surplus of "women [who] could not—or would not—perform those tasks nature and their instincts assigned them" (Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 4). Faber characterises Emmeline Fox as a woman who is not taken seriously by men: she is mocked by Bodwell and Ashley and her father Dr Curlew does not pay heed to her efforts with the poor. Moreover, the reasons behind Henry Rackham's interest in philanthropy is mainly to have a romantic liaison with Mrs Fox, something Faber makes explicit in the novel: "[Henry's] desire to impress Mrs Fox is the only thing that may lend him the courage to take the Holy Orders; yet, if he were to

win Emmeline's love, would he care a fig for anything else in the world?" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 272).

During a conversation between Agnes and William, Mrs Fox's independent character is disclosed:

> 'She … doesn't even wish to remarry, he says.' 'Oh? What does she wish to do?' 'She spends almost all her time with the Women's Rescue Society.' 'Working then?' ' . . . Charity, she's a volunteer, she's expected to do… well, whatever she's asked to. The way Dr Curlew describes it, I understand she spends entire days away at the Refuge or even on the streets themselves, and that when she visits him afterwards, her clothes fairly stink.' (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 144-45)

The passage reveals how Mrs Fox has encountered an alternative lifestyle in her role as a charity worker within the Rescue Society where she works at the refuge or frequents the street in order to help the outcast. The reference to foul smell in her clothes suggests that she moves in close proximity to squalor and interacts with slum dwellers. Walkowitz notices how middle-class women used the role of philanthropy to venture into the East End slums "in search of adventure and self-discovery" and enjoyed more social freedom as a result (*City* 52). For Victorian women the impoverished areas provided a social space outside the patriarchal framework, and I suggest that Mrs Fox's unwillingness to remarry relies on the fact that she prefers the independence and social mobility granted her in the role of a philanthropist to subdue to the control of a husband. As Pilar Hidalgo contends in her study of the female urban experience in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*:

> Miriam [Henderson] is one of the first women to walk extensively about the modern city. . . [and] her combination of involvement and non-involvement

> (both characteristic of the *flâneur*) hinge on gender. For one thing, her leisure depends on her not being married, on her mother being dead, and on her resiting emotional demands made on her by other women.[64] (95)

In a similar vein, Emmeline Fox's independence and accessability to the streets depend on her being a widow who lives on her own, and thus, is freed from patriarchal restraints. This is something she is conscious of and she clearly enjoys the freedom of walking the streets.

Mobility and agency converge within the subjective experience acquired through charity work. Women who took active participation in charity organisations challenged the public/private dichotomy in a dual manner—they managed to proclaim a female space within the public sphere simultaneously as they encountered privacy with the public realm. Wendy Gan asserts that the cityscape was an ideal setting to subjective explorations of gendered space:

> [f]or women, being in the city was an escape from the domestic world and an experience marked as anew kind of spatial freedom. This transgressive incursion into male territory, however, was not the only appeal of the city for new urban modes of consciousness that privileged male reserve and aversion . . . also provided women with a way to transform public spaces into private, creating a kind of public privacy. (Gan 48)

As a consequence philanthropists not only destabilised the gendered ideology of separate spheres, but they also found a way to move outside the patriarchal framework. In the novel, the female figure of philanthropy, Emmeline Fox, turns the city into a site of personal fulfilment not only through altruistic endeavour, but in relation to her experience of freedom of movement and power.

[64] For an indepth analysis of literary portrayal of female *flânerie* in London in the context of modernity, see Hidalgo's article "Female *Flânerie* in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*".

In the context of philanthropy mobility is two-fold as it consists in both geographical displacement and a transgression of social spheres. On the one hand, philanthropists traverse the city in order to visit their marginalised sisters in the poor areas of the cities, and on the other hand, by venturing out into the public sphere, the philanthropist defied the gendered restriction to the domestic realm. Chad Heap notices that the practice of slumming offered the accommodated classes the opportunity to "venture beyond the protective of their own neighborhoods" but also reinforced the perception of the city as a segregated space (18). While Heap speaks about class division, I wish to emphasise that visiting the slums had a specific meaning for women as they defied spatial restrictions based on gender difference. In other words, charity work provided women the possibility to bend and subvert the gendered restraints dictated by the ideology of separate spheres. Supported by the ideals of female domesticity charity workers challenged the public/private division by transferring domestic duties into the public realm, and as a result, female philanthropists discovered new ways to acquire a subjective experience of the city.

Koven has argued that slumming was sparked by a voyeuristic curiosity to gaze at the poor and in this regard the outcast areas of the city became sites of pleasure and entertainment for the well-to-do. Heap concurs with Koven on this point and highlights how women derived pleasure from slumming:

> The presence of reformers—especially female reformers—on the streets and in the tenements and dives of these districts paradoxically suggested that such spaces were safe for popular congregation, and reformers' activities in the cities' slums and red-light districts were often remarkably similar to those of their pleasure-seeking compatriots. . . . [I]ntrusions into the slums were first and

> foremost the product of bourgeois conception of the spatial dynamics and organisation of [the city]. (19)

Heap's remark testifies to the social dimension of space, and the critic pays heed to the social structure of spatial representation and the relevance of class and gender. This suggests that the lives of the poor were conceived as a spectacle for the bourgoiesie.

To travel into the slums acquired additional meaning for women as they got access to the sights of the city as well as mobility within the public sphere. Moreover, the spatial dynamics noticed by Heap above not only opened up the public realm for women, but also represented the opportunity to assert a female space outside the domestic sphere. Emmeline Fox's travel in the underground as she traverses the city can be linked to her independency:

> I was in the city, on my way to visit a wretched family I'd visited before, to plead with them once more to listen to the words of their Saviour. I was tired, I felt disinclined to walk far. Before I knew what I was doing I was in the Underground Railway pulled by an engine, mesmerised by the alternation of darkness and light, speeding through the earth of a sixpence. I spoke to no one; I might as well have been a ghost. I enjoyed it so much, I missed my stop, and never saw the family. (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 194-95)

The fact that Emmeline Fox misses her visit to the poor family because the thrill of speed and freedom of movement she experiences during the ride in the underground train reveals that she does not necessarily perform charity work because of altruistic interests. Conversely, she rejoices in the privileges that urban excursions grant her otherwise gender-delineated environment. Simultaneously, while Mrs Fox uses public transport she manages to recreate a private space during her train ride, which Gan refers to as a "mobile private space" (48), one that, "facilitated the consolidation of identity"

(64). In this sense, mobility was emancipatory for philanthropists in the Victorian era as they subverted gendered codes of domesticity as well as division of public/private spaces.

The philanthropic involvement in the lives of the poor contributed agency to the charity worker who not only travelled on her own but also rescued prostitutes and children from the streets and taught working-class housewives how to improve the domestic environment. Walkowitz draws attention to how their class-superiority also ensured them authority claiming that "[t]these women enjoyed the freedom of the streets . . . because they wielded considerable authority" (*City* 57). Nonetheless, such instances are not portrayed in *The Crimson Petal and the White* and middle-class characters are rather mocked than respected by prostitutes. For instance, Mrs Fox is ridiculed by a prostitute she attempts to rescue: "'You'd make a good whore yerself!' the giggling trollop assured her. 'I c'n tell! You ain't wearin' a corset, are yer? I c'n see yer teats!'" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 626). As I have argued elsewhere, Henry Rackham has a similar experience during an interview with a prostitute,[65] and in this sense Faber oversees how philanthropy yielded middle-class members authority in the slums.

However, Emmeline Fox's engagement in charity work is linked to the church and her Christian faith, and as Vicinus affirms:

> religious belief gave many women courage to move beyond conformity to social norms. Most of the pioneering generation of single women first gained experience and leadership skills in some charity organization; some spent their entire lives promoting social reforms under the aegis of philanthropy. (*Independent Women* 22)

[65] See "'The Private Rooms and Public Haunts': Theatricality and the City of London in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*" in *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now* for analysis of male slumming, in a comparison between male and female perceptions of the city.

The church grants Emmeline Fox the possibility to move within the slums and interact with its dwellers as she may do so in the name of the Bible. In addition, when the Rescue Society finds her in too poor health to participate in the organisation, the church allows her to continue: "After all, the church has one great advantage over the Rescue Society – it won't send me a letter telling me not to come anymore" (458). Mrs Fox complains to Henry that she "[goes] mad with boredom" when she is required to rest because of her consumption, which testifies to that she finds personal fulfilment outside the home instead of suffer and be still at home as Sarah Stickney Ellis famously stated (Faber, *The Crimson Petal and the White* 432).

Yet, Faber does not explore philanthropic agency and authority and this is one of the major flaws of the novel. The author has left out references to legal measures against prostitution as the Vagrancy Act and the Contagious Diseases Acts which circumscribed both the lives of prostitutes and led to a tense political and feminist campaign. As explained in 3.1.1., the Contagious Diseases Act legally discriminated women as the source of venereal disease and enforced legal measures as medical examinations and incarceration. On the other side, feminist campaigners worked for the repeal of the acts but did not manage to achieve this until 1886. Faber ignores this legal document, and positively he is able to grant Sugar more mobility than would have been possible in reality as she would have been targeted by the police as a source of contamination. Nevertheless, Emmeline Fox would probably have been involved in political organisations working to improve the legal condition of the prostitute. Admittedly, Faber is not a feminist writer, and in this context Sarah Waters's depiction of the feminist movement and politicised philanthropy in *Tipping the Velvet* fills this gap.

Notwithstanding, Emmeline Fox is described as a woman with agency only that Faber has decided to place her authority and agency on the axis of sex. Mrs Fox characterises an odd woman, yet, not in W. R. Greg's sense representative of the surplus of unmarried women in England.[66] Conversely, she has been married once and has a potential husband in Henry Rackham only that she does not wish to remarry. Emmeline Fox is an odd woman in relation to the Victorian ideal of femininity and domesticity and this causes unease among the men who ridicule her, especially for her physical aspect. While Ashwell poses the question "can a woman who works with prostitutes be virtuous?", his companion Boadley wonders "how can [Henry] stand the sight of her?' groans Boadley. 'She looks like a greyhound! That long, leathery face, and that wrinkled forehead – and always so terrible attentive, just like a dog listening for commands" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 154). Her unfeminine physical aspect, unconventional habit of taking active participation in the public sphere and penetrating gaze unsettles the gendered hierarchy. Massey notes how "the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control, and, through that, a social control of identity" (179). Yet, Mrs Fox circumvents the spatial limits and gendered identity that has been designated by patriarchal normativity by performing a distinct social role than submissive wife and familiarity with the public realm.

Even though the consumption-affected Mrs Fox does not answer to the ideal of feminine beauty and bourgeois decorum she is perceived as a strong woman by Henry: "that peculiar soul Emmeline Fox is unadorned. She holds her head as high as if she were beautiful, and holds her body as if she were strong" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 190). In addition, Faber draws on Victorian prejudices regarding the new woman and

[66] In his essay "Why Are Women Redundant?" (1862) W. R Greg expressed his anxiety about vast amount unmarried working women because they represented the direct opposition to the Victorian womanhood as they were financially independent from men by working in the public sphere, in Greg's words, "in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, [single women] are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own" (Greg 3).

her unfeminine habits are reflected in the masculine traits in her physical description. Henry even suspects her to have an Adam's apple on one point, "Henry has never noticed before, and a red flush on her Adam's apple – if women have Adam's apples, which he's not sure they do" (278). Faber's description of Emmeline Fox as unadorned, uncorseted, or as holding a strong upright posture or even having an Adam's apple, is reminiscent of the masculine woman described in New Woman fiction in the Victorian era. Craton remarks that nineteenth-century writers' use of masculine women was "to challenge the moral, cultural and political restrictions facing women by demanding the rights of men. Many of them share the unusual physicality of Collins's masculine women" (124). Emmeline Fox echoes the character Marian Holcombe in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*: the ugly, uncorseted spinster:

> The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck of the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude . . . her waist . . . occupied its natural place, it filled in out its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully unformed by stays . . . She approached nearer—and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail to express), the lady was ugly! . . . [N]ever was the fair promise of such a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. (Collins 36-37)

Emmeline Fox mirrors Marion Holcombe and both have hybrid features that place them in-between femininity and masculinity: their naturally shaped bodies that reveal female corporeality combined with dark complexion, coarse faces and Adam's apple or moustache present "shocking gender hybridity to build a case for non-traditional femininity" (Craton 126). Similarly to Walter Hartright who feels sexually attracted to Marian Holcombe, Henry Rackham is infatuated with Emmeline Fox. Moreover,

Henry's fascination with Emmeline Fox's androgynous gender identity is a replication of William's obsession with Sugar: "she has an Adam's apple, like a man. Yes, he has decided now: she is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 109).

Craton affirms that the social unease provoked by the new woman found its way into the Victorian novel, and authors often invoked freak-show imagery of gender confusion to portray unconventional women (121). While Sugar is a prostitute whose unmistakable strangeness is described in terms of freakish, monstrous or androgynous, Mrs Fox's oddity as a woman with masculine traits is linked to her challenge of gender discrimination. In other words, she is an odd woman in the political sense and consequently perceived as a freak: "By the next century, predicts Mrs Fox, buttering a slice of bread, women like me will no longer be regarded as freaks" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 223).

Ironically, Emmeline Fox is the sexually experienced woman who seduces and deflowers the inexperienced Henry, who is practically ignorant of the female sex. As argued above, Mrs Fox is characterised as having agency, yet Faber determines to settle her authority in the context of sexuality and stages a comic reversal of male and female roles as sexually active and passive. Braid stresses how women were expected to be disembodied, spiritual and chaste according to the Victorian cult of true womanhood, and links this to "the spectrum of polarised discourse" regarding female sexuality as either angels or monsters reverberate in *The Crimson Petal and the White* (3). While Agnes is a disembodied and sexless angel and a madwoman in the attic, Sugar is a fallen angel and a prostitute with a monstrous sexual appetite. In this sense, Emmeline Fox occupies the middle ground in between Agnes and Sugar, and is even described as an angel by Henry: "How handsome she is! She dresses like an angel – an angel in grey

serge" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 191). Hence, in comparison to Sugar and Agnes, Emmeline Fox is a woman in-between—she is a highly eroticised woman who knows how to take pleasure in the sexual act, she is neither disembodied angel of the house nor the sexually perverted prostitute. Notwithstanding, her sexuality is close to modern perception of female sexuality as according to the Victorian norms "monstrosity was also any kind of sexual desire not regulated by marriage, or an overt expression of female desire" (Braid 2-3). In contrast, Emmeline Fox seduces Henry with the words "there is no marriage in Heaven, Henry" (Faber, *The Crimson Petal* 503).

Faber represents the city of London in a way that highlights its inherent theatricality and its essential connection to the performance of every-day life as participating in a spectacle is heightened by the visual sensation of neo-Victorianism. In doing so, the city is perceived, conceived and lived as if it was a huge stage set and characters enact different roles according to different social spaces. Faber uses a range of Victorian stock characters and I have focused on two women, Sugar and Emmeline Fox. Whereas Sugar escapes prostitution first as William's concubine, then as his daughter's governess and finally Sophie's surrogate mother, Mrs Fox maintains the role of a philanthropist throughout the novel. I have examined these characters in the context of urban spatial hierarchies and women's roles in the societal organisation of the public/private dichotomy to unearth how these two urban figures make sense of their role in society and how this contribute to her identity.

Sugar's shift between domestic settings, from the private rooms at and domestic sphere at Cheapstow Villa, as well as seclusion of Emmeline Fox to her father's home and a rest cure testify to Massey's parallel between spatial control and social control of identity (179-80). These unconventional women take pleasure in walking the city and experience a sense of freedom and independence in the public areas of the city, while

"unnerved" or "bored to death" when kept passive and still in the domestic area. Pollock asserts that "[public] territories of the bourgeois city were however not only gendered on a male/female polarity. They became sites for the negotiation of gendered class identities and class gender positions" (70). Space is a central constituent in the formation of female identity. By destabilising the public/private dichotomy these women spatialise their identities and assert an alternative female identity to then one inscribed by the Victorian cult of domesticity. The way in which gender is contextualised in relation to social practices highlights the performative nature of both space and gender and in the novel these ideas are enhanced by the performativity of the novel.

The performative mode of neo-Victorian literature together with its metafictional and intertextual playfulness invite the reader to observe and enjoy Victorian society from a perspective reminiscent of the privileged position of a *flâneur*, who watches and takes pleasure in the spectacle displayed upon the urban scene. In observing the Victorians from a distance, present-day readers perform an act of *flânerie* as they gaze at the past from a different time with detachment, which permits readers to enjoy the Victorian panorama for their own amusement. Thus, "a displacement occurs from the spatial to the temporal axis" as the spatial distance between audience and performer is recreated in the temporal gap between the twenty-first century reader and the nineteenth-century narrator (Kohlke, "Neo-Victorian Sexsation" 12). Similarly, Shields places a stress on consumerism claiming that

> [*f*]*lânerie* is the psychotic appropriation of space and time. On the one hand, the city was explored and visually consumed as a series of 'exotic' sights; on the other hand, the *flâneur* consumed time, measured in terms of bodily footsteps

> and consumption, against the increasing ordinance of public life by the punch-clock measuring time in terms of labour and productivity. (73)

In his theatrical depiction of Victorian London, Faber destabilises the ideological binaries of the public/private dichotomy by allowing the characters to move with liberty between different class and gender spheres. In doing so, Faber enables contemporary readers to stroll through nineteenth-century society as the characters in the novel carry the gaze of the reader along the Victorian streets.

The author both relies on and deconstructs stereotyped and homogeneous images of the Victorians by offering an alternative version of Victorian London combining narrative voices from different classes and including previously marginalised characters. Marcus suggests that Victorian otherness "remains an interest to us as we try to understand the past and our relation to the past. Their otherness connects them to us as well. Connection is nevertheless not an identity – and in the end these Victorians also remain both other to us and Victorian" (xix). Indeed, it is exactly "the Other Victorians" that are under our gaze. In this regard, Shields stresses that *flânerie* "involves staging an alienated relationship with the environment . . . the *flâneur* is the inversion of the figure of the Stranger . . . his sense of space-time dislocation and disorientation [is] due to the expanding scale of social relations" (77). Therefore, the reader's perspective resembles the *flâneur*'s gaze. Several critics have stressed the relevance of the *flâneur* to late twenty-century culture. Whereas Shields pays attention to the *flâneur*'s shifting social spatialisation suggestion that "the *flâneur*'s problems are as timely for us at the close of the twentieth century as they were for the Parisian dandy in the nineteenth century" (Shields 77), Brand claims that "the flaneur [sic] . . . anticipates the habits of image consumption of the twentieth century" (8).

In the same vein as the *flâneur* gazes at the urban panorama "[to] complete his otherwise incomplete identity; satisfy his otherwise dissatisfied existence; replace the sense of bereavement with a sense of life" (Tester 7), or "[attempts] to impose order upon the potentially disorienting diversity of the city, by reducing it to accessible images that [can] be collected and consumed" (Brand 7), the reader takes visual or imaginary possession of the city in *The Crimson Petal and the White*. In this section, I have focused on how two female characters map out gendered spaces in the city and analysed how their urban experiences contribute to their subjectivity. While Sugar and Emmeline Fox practise female *flânerie* and rely on a specific consciousness indebted to their social positions, and, consequently are obliged to adopt different strategies to gain access to the city, the reader-as-observer occupies the detached position of a Baudelairian *flâneur* that takes visual possession of the Victorian past. The novel displays a multilayered version of the nineteenth century and gives the impression of being more real than official history itself—past secrets are revealed and the reader gains privileged access to scenes behind the Victorian façade. Therefore, by approaching the nineteenth century from a contemporary standpoint the reader gazes at the past adopting a voyeuristic attitude and the neo-Victorian author recreates a historical past by staging it as a spectacle for the reader.

5.4. How We Look: Neo-Victorian Enfreakment in Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* (2013)

The current trend of freak shows in neo-Victorian literature retrieves the nineteenth-century fascination with the strange body to turn an exploitative space as the sideshow into a site of self-reliance, self-fulfillment and self-representation. Just as "the Victorian freak shows were increasingly criticized for their challenges to middle-class ideology" (Craton 26), authors today defy normativity and discourses of normalcy by readdressing the disabled body using the neo-Victorian performative mode. By taking a closer look at the human behind the freak in *The Palace of Curiosities*, Garland places emphasis on the spatialising of idenitites, and in this sense, socially constructed categories as space and gender are destabilised to explore new modes of perception and representation of human oddities. Craton proposes that

> [t]he experience of bodily spectacle opens a dialogue about both the nature of physical difference and whatever validating aspect of normative ideology—patriotism, class-based respectability, gender, or physical ideals—is applied to the performance. An audience asking questions is an audience engaged in collective ideological negotiation. (36)

This chapter brings together three core characteristics of neo-Victorian literature that have attracted the attention of scholars in the twenty-first century: Neo-Victorianism is self-consciously reflective (Heilmann and Llewellyn 4; Davies 12), densely visual (Arias, "Neo-Victorian Fiction and the Senses" n. pag.; Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 10) and performative (Gamble 126; Davies 10), and the concept of the reader-as-observer is central to these three tenets.

The present-day revisionist fervour to resurrect the Victorians to read and reread the nineteenth-century by inferring contemporary values onto the past both distance us from and connect us to the Victorians. In this context, Heilmann and Llewellyn remark: "neo-Victorian literature sets up a mirror-like or reflective stance between our own period and that of the nineteenth century" (144). Taking this as a starting point, I seek to address the freak performer in Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities* in an attempt to find out how the neo-Victorian mode interlocks the Victorian freak-show discourse with the reader's perspective. On the one hand, I will explore how voice, vision and subjectivity intertwine in the performance of freak identity, which represents a stance of speaking back to the Victorians. On the other hand, drawing on Davies's statement that "neo-Victorianism can be perceived as 'talking to itself' as opposed to entering into any sense of dialogue with the past" (34), I will examine in what way the neo-Victorian freak show allows the Victorians to speak back to us. In the *Palace of Curiosities*, Garland ties themes of humanity, gender and identity to freak-show imagery to explore how socially constructed categories are performed rather than embodied. My discussion of *The Palace of Curiosities* will be guided by contemporary approaches to freak studies and the relevance of vision, in particular Rose-Marie Garland-Thomson's conceptualisation of the stare.

In *Staring: How We Look* (2009), Garland-Thomson defines the stare as "an ocular response to what we don't expect to see . . . we stare when ordinary seeing fails, when we want to know more" (3). The critic elaborates her theory on the specific power dynamics and dialogic relationship that the stare implies. The subtitle hints at our dual position as simultaneously being observers and objects of observation; how we look at our surrounding and our own outer appearance. Therefore, I suggest that the stare provides a feasible critical tool to examine the subjectivity and agency of freak

performers. This specific mode of seeing acknowledges the agency of the freak exhibit as an active contributor of the perception of his or her identity. Garland-Thomson distinguishes the stare for being "an encounter between a starer and a staree [that] sets in motion an intrapersonal relationship . . . this intense visual engagement creates an circuit of communication and meaning-making. Staring becomes involvement, and being stared at demands response" (*Staring* 3). Consequently, the freak performer has the possibility to advert the gaze and engage the spectator in a negotiation of identity that subverts (mis)interpretations of human status.

Garland-Thomson's emphasis on the interactive structure that supports this specific mode of watching invites for a new approach to divergent corporeality as it situates disabled people within the scope of agency and subjectivity. In my examination of the neo-Victorian freak show I will explore the stare in a twofold way. First, I will examine how freak characters are perceived and conceived as visually different through the lens of Garland-Thomson's binary model of the starer/staree, to later expand the same notion onto the reader-as-observer that I find so central to the performativity of neo-Victorian literature. But my focus here is to examine the subjectivity of freak performers to the spectacle of divergent bodies, and subsequently discuss how and for what purpose neo-Victorian literary genre attributes humanity to freaks. As Kérchy and Zittlau detail, "[a]lthough Continental European freaks are introduced as products of ideologically-infiltrated representations, they also emerge as embodied subjects endowed with their own voice, view, and subversive agency" (11). This new critical perspective on freak performers opens up for new interpretation of the person who embodies the freak. The objectifying gaze has for long been the dominating critical device applied on freak studies, nevertheless, now the time is ripe to look for alternative

modes of watching that are structured according to a distinct power dynamics than object/subject aligned with dichotomies such as passive/active, male/female.

Sarah Gamble's contention that neo-Victorianism is a performative mode refers to its intertextual and metafictional characterstics as she delineates this literary mode as a double act of repetition that evokes both a historical and a literary past. Davies's study of the trope of ventriloquism gives insight to the performativity of neo-Victorianism from a different angle. She focuses on the use of voice and the inherent power dynamics of ventriloquism in terms of agency/passivity and speaking to/speaking through. Consequently she sheds new light over the idea of the performative and her application of Judith Butler's theory on gender performance to explore how neo-Victorian literature establishes a dialogue with the Victorian era. Butler's notion of gender performance has been extensively applied as a method of assessment to examine gender identities in literature since the 1990s. As I have discussed in section 5.2., Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* is underpinned by Butler's theory and the author even includes allusion to the critical thinker in the novel. In contrast, Davies returns to the linguistic basis of Butler's theory, which to a large extent has been overseen by scholars who have concentrated on gender identity as a socially constructed category. Davies ponders on the question "to what extent does our sense of historical dialogue with the Victorian era actually depend upon 'us' being interpellated into discourse by them?" (2-3). Drawing on Butler's theory on gender performance, Davies suggests that

> *Performativity is the process of historical repetition*. Even the most 'subversive' of performances – whether in the form of gender or neo-Victorianism – is necessarily dependent on the prior 'script' on which it attempts to alter. This raises a crucial question: how can we tell if a recitation is enacting a subversion of the prior script, or if it is mere repetition? (10)

Following this cue, I would like to argue that neo-Victorian novels that are set within freak-show environments are highly subversive and reiterate nineteenth-century freak discourses and modes of representation in order to overturn adverse narratives of enfreakment.

The Palace of Curiosities (2013) is set in Victorian London and follows the lives and fates of Eve the Lion-Faced Woman, and Abel, the Man without History in their struggle to assert humanity throughout the narrative. The novel commences with the birth of Eve in 1832 but concentrates mainly on a two-year period between January 1857 and November 1858. By situating the plot before the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), Garland evades the nineteenth-century Darwinian discourse of missing links that was central to the Victorian freak representation to instead focus on the theatrical connotations of the freak show.[67] The plot unfolds in two narrative strands told in the first-person, starting off as two separate stories that converge in the middle of the novel when the protagonists end up in the same freak show. Garland states that, although the use of the first person may alienate the reader when the character is strange, she decided let the characters speak for themselves because "I wanted the reader to be much closer to the freak…" (Pettersson, "Re: Málaga" n. pag.). The novel is structured in chapters that alternately depict Eve's and Abel's points of view. The juxtaposition of Eve and Abel contrasts their characters and complements each another as focalisers, and as we shall see, this is of central relevance to the reader perspective. Garland plays with different narrative strategies as voice and focalisation and combines realism with magic realism to manipulate the reader's perspective.

[67] Theories on human evolution and natural selection were central to the mid-Victorian freak discourse and Darwin's theories gave cue to freak-show managers to exploit the theme of missing links between man and ape. Julia Pastrana's (1834-1860) life testifies to the entrance of the Darwinian discourse into the freak show as she in the initial state of her career was displayed as the hybrid bear woman or the ugliest woman in the world, to later be promoted as the ape woman or a missing link between ape and man. For more details on Julia Pastrana in a Darwinian context see Gylseth and Toverud's biography *Julia Pastrana*, especially chapters five and six.

In her review of *The Palace of Curiosities*, Judith Flanders argues that freak narratives are often utilised to explore modern alienation and ponders on the question whether freak characters in contemporary literature are "as cynically used by their authors as by P. T. Barnum: look at them, the books cry, look how odd, how different!" (3). Indeed, authors apply the same modes of representations as freak show managers did in the Victorian era in their portrayal of freak characters, however, as I hope to demonstrate in this section, this is consciously done for specific purposes. I will discuss how Garland incorporates the freak performers' voices to describe their individual experiences of the freak show, and argue that this marks a stark contrast to the objectifying and dehumanising practices that lie at heart of nineteenth-century freak iconography.

In contrast to the nineteenth-century freak show, authors who recur to neo-Victorianism are concerned with attributing the freak character with a voice of their own and in doing so they ascribe them humanity and agency. Instead of "repeat[ing] a patriarchal heternormative script of passivity and objectification" (Davies 8),[68] Garland incorporates the gendered power imbalance of the Victorian era to subvert it by making the freaks active agents of self-representation. The protagonists complement their narratives with different strategies to make meaning of their identities. On the one hand, Eve's narrative is supplemented with the voice of her invisible friend Donkey-Skin who offers insight into Eve's consciousness:

> [i]f I was hairy, then [Donkey-Skin] was a furry as a cave full of bears. If I was I freak, she was a cursed abomination in the sight of God. If I was lonely, she was

[68] Davies explores the relationship between the puppet and the ventriloquist in four Victorian novels and argues that there is a repeated pattern that resembles the "feminized condition whereas the agency of 'voice'and ventriloquial prowess is linked to masculinity" (8). Although this is not my concern here, the idea a passive objects that deliver speeches that have been written for them has been applied to human exhibits as well. This, however, ignores the freak's role as performers and their capacity to manipulate the audience.

> abandoned on a hillside for wolves to devour. She was different because she did not care. Her life's work was to teach me not to care either. (Garland 16)

Her description of Donkey-Skin mirrors her inner feelings and from the outset of the novel the reader is emotionally involved with her character and led into seeing Eve as a human being. The stress placed on feelings, thoughts and personal concern for being accepted makes the reader sympathise with Eve.

On the other hand, Abel resorts to writing to overpower his lack of memory in an attempt to reconstruct his past. As Shuttleworth argues, "our very humanity is dependent on the power to memory" ("Natural History" 47). In these lines, Abel struggles constantly throughout the novel to obtain memory to assert his humanity. He attempts to trace his past through acts of writing and reading the fragmentary memories that surface up sporadically: "Then I read my words, and with the reading remember. In a few lines of ink I make my history mine once more. I am filled with terrible relief and clutch the paper to my heart. I know who I am" (95). The ways in which the voices and inner consciousness of these characters filter through the depiction of them as freaks represent self-reflexive instances that assert them active agents in the portrayal of their freak status.

The character of Eve is partly based on two real-life human exhibits that suffered from Hypertrichosis—a rare medical condition of excessive body and facial hair.[69] The Mexican Bear Woman Julia Pastrana (1834-60) was exhibited by her manager, who also was her husband, as the ugliest woman in the world. After her death,

[69] This medical condition is subdivided into two categories according to the amount of hair. While localized hypertrichosis concentrate on isolated areas, generalised hyptrichosis covers the entire body. This strange physical disorder is informally known as the werewolf syndrome and several human exhibits were represented as hybrids between man and animal in nineteenth-century freak shows. Recently, scientists have found out that this physical divergence is caused by a genetic mutation of chromosomes.

he mummified her (and her infant son who had died soon after birth) and continued to display her at museums.[70] Craton denounces that

> [t]his last phase of Pastrana's career reveals freak show practice at it most troubling: the odd body is merely an object, deprived of will. Presented under the glass for the gaze of middle-class consumers, Pastrana entertains her audience and validates their normalcy without any voice in how her difference is perceived. (2)

In addition, Eve's birth echoes the myth surrounding Stephan Bribowski (1891-1932), or Lionel, who turned into half man/half lion because his mother witnessed a man being devoured by a lion during her pregnancy. Maternal imprinting, the belief that excessive emotional stimuli on pregnant women could result in birth defects, was a common belief in nineteenth-century Britain and even defended by medical doctors. For instance, scientists declared Julia Pastrana's exhibition in London, 1857, a public health risk as it endangered the unborn children of pregnant women (Craton 1-2). Garland intertwines the superstition of maternal imprinting with the stories Stephan Bribowski and Julia Pastrana in the novel as Eve acquires the features of a lion because her mother inhales the breath of a lion at the circus when pregnant.

Since birth, Eve is made aware of that her abnormal physical state is not desirable and her mother prohibits mirrors to protect her daughter from seeing her own reflection. More importantly, her mother tries to fit her into the frame of normalcy by annihilating her difference by seclusion and constant shaving, "I am making you beautiful, ' she snapped, and started to cry. I'm doing this because I love you." (Garland 32). Her insistence on normalising Eve brings the question of who dictates the image of

[70] Julia Pastrana's body was expatriated to Mexico in February 2013 to receive a proper burial after having been in storage in the cellar of the Institute of Forensic Medicine at the University of Oslo since 1996 (D. Wilson n. pag.). Plate 4 in appendix shows of display of Julia Pastrana and her son after death, and plate 5 is Stephan Bribowski's carte de visite as Lionel: The Lion-Faced Boy.

the socially accepted and what we perceive as the visually normal to the forefront. Contrary to her mother's viewpoint, Eve has still not internalised normative values and her inner dialogue with her invisible friend revolves around the idea that normalcy is desired: "that night Donkey-Skin visited me as I undressed for sleep. 'Mama's made me pretty,' I sang, spinning in a circle to show off my nakedness. *Pretty?* She snorted. *She's made you ordinary.* Mama told me I am a real girl now. It must be true.'" (Garland 18). Eve's thoughts manifest the human basic need to be loved and the desire for social acceptance. Nevertheless, she has still not assumed the normative value of beauty and femininity her mother wants her to comply with and she fights back her mother's attempts of shaving her as soon as she has the force to.

Garland-Thomson holds that

> [m]odern culture strictly prescribes our behaviour, appearance, and our relations to another, even while we celebrate freedom of choice. Stareable sight breaks the rules we live by, which makes them unusual. We want perhaps to see the unusual but not be the unusual. Novelty in this context is both what we seek and avoid. (32)

This is portrayed in the novel the instance Eve ventures out into the streets in her natural appearance to prove to her mother that she can be accepted just the way she is. Eve visits the zoo in search for spectators that can confirm her belief, "what better place to prove I was no animal than here, where the dividing line was drawn so clearly? They were in cages, I was not" (Garland 20). However, Eve's plan backfires at her as the crowd instead of noting her difference from animals, focuses on the resemblance and from this experience she learns that her physical appearance is an obstruction. Contrary of confirming her conviction that she can be accepted as she is, Eve realises that her mother's view is supported by the norm. The zoo represents a space of collection,

commodification and observation of animals, and as we shall see Eve's transformation of selfhood is linked to her perception of the public display of her divergent corporeality within the world of spectacle.

When Mr Arroner starts courting Eve she is beguiled into believing that he sees her as a woman and accept his proposal confident of becoming his beloved wife. Nevertheless, just like the real case of Theodore Lent and Julia Pastrana, Mr. Arroner marries Eve to control her earnings and make profit from her as a freak. Lent's reasons were purely financial and the he wanted to secure her as his private possession:

> Lent know he was sitting on a goldmine and he had no plans of letting her go. She was, in spite of everything, an adult, intelligent woman who might one day develop a greater sense about her financial worth thas she had done up to now. He only saw one solution, even if it was rather drastic. He proposed to Julia and she beamingly accepted. (44)

As I have described in section 2.2.2 Victorian marriage subjected women into the possession of her husband and, in the novel, Mr Arroner marries Eve to turn her into a commodity. He converts the parlour of their home into a private freak chamber where he exhibits his Lion-Faced wife as a freak for paying visitors. Garland invokes the Victorian ideology of domesticity here to explore the character of Eve as a female freak. Within the bourgeois home, the drawing room served the purpose of receiving and entertaining guests, and thus, drawing-room performances testify to the porosity of the public/private dichotomy. Despotopoulou notices that drawing-room performances gave a public function to a private space within the middle-class household (92), and the critic contends that for women "the abuse of visibility also meant the abuse of privacy" (90). Eve is bereaved of privacy both as a woman and as freak performer. In addition, the stylised script surrounding the stage representation of Eve as a Victorian Lady

reveals the social construction and the performative nature of gender and freak identity, as, echoing Judith Butler, both are displayed as stylised repetitions of social acts. In these terms, the performative essence of the Victorian freak show envisions freak status, gender identity and social space as socially constructed categories.

The freak show as a social entertainment can be analysed according to the three levels of social space that Lefebvre labelled triadic space. The representation of Eve as freak resemblances the mode Julia Pastrana in which her husband-manager staged her. Craton highlights how women with extreme facial hair like Julia Pastrana dissolve gender divide because masculine traits are visible on an apparent female body: "female facial hair is spectacular only because of the assumption that there is a firm natural boundary between the genders" (122). Garland transmits this in the novel in her description of Mr Arroner's presentation of his wife in which he plays upon the clash between physical reality and what the spectators understand as femininity, "[f]or beneath her savage and terrifying appearance quivers the heart of a true Lady. Who can estimate the delicacy of emotion, the tenderness of expression which is concealed behind such a savage visage" (Garland 121). Tromp's notion of epistemological speculation concurs with Lefebvre's concept of spatial practice in the act of reading and inferring cultural knowledge onto the odd body within freak-show entertainment spaces. Mr Arroner's engages with what the viewers understand as femininity and this testifies to the performative nature of gender identity, and as Craton notes, "[the hairy lady's] presence in popular culture calls into question the natural basis of gender roles and assert the importance of those roles to Victorian spectators" (Craton 122). In this regard, the freak performance stands as a mirror of social ideals where the observer confirms his/her perception of the self against the backdrop of enfreakment.

The underlying structure of the freak show is planned according to theatrical principles that stage human oddities in highly stylised scripts and consequently conceive divergent people as freaks. Mr Arroner does not set up the freak show at home by chance. He conceives Eve as a freak against the backdrop of a respectable middle-class home in which Eve plays the role of domesticated wife. In addition, the act of reading the freakish body and the representation of the abnormal body together represents produce a social space. Craton views the freakish body beyond the idea of seeing it as a mere foil to middle-class normative culture by posing the question "what if an odd body could influence normative culture, not just as a transgression, but through subtle connections with and variations upon normative ideals" (4). Craton points at the freak show as an important mirror of the social ideals and normative ideology of the Victorian period and anticipates the freak as an integrate component in the perception of disability. In this regard, I suggest, that the freak show is a social space where the audience and performer are situated in a face-to-face situation where all subjects involved are permitted to participate in visual and dialogic responses.

I have described how nineteenth-century freak exhibitions consisted in a speculative encounter were ablebodied could scrutinise human oddities. This aligns the freak show as a process of self-assertion where the viewer situates him/herself within the spectrum of normalcy, which Marlene Tromp refers to as "an epistemological speculation" (8). The visual encounter in the freak show is deeply inflected with a subjective response of the observer who scrutinises the visually strange to assert his/her identity and this is at work in the novel. Elizabeth Grosz labels this "the corporeal limits of subjectivity [, i.e.] [t]he ways in which the body is lived and represented, the inputs and effects of the subject's corporeality on its identity" ("Intolerable Ambiguity" 55). This is a process during which the audience measures normalcy against freakishness in

terms of Lacan's mirror stage that delineates the spectator/freak as the I/not-I. In this regard, I concur with Nadine Boehm-Shcnitker and Susanne Gruss who assert that this "second-order observation, the very construction of subjectivity" is central to neo-Victorian literature assert (10-11), and this is an idea I explore in *The Palace of Curiosities*.

Current readings into the freak demarcate the divergent body as something more than just a foil to normalcy. Marlene Tromp and Karyn Valerius draw heavily on the work of Bogdan in their consideration of the specific dynamics of freak performances concluding that, "enfreakment is not just about nature's work but rather is created by the body, plus its context, plus individual choices" (Introduction 8). It is a contradictory and complex task to elaborate ideas that favour the consent and volition of freaks due to the exploitative nature and the objectifying practice of the freak show. In these lines, David A. Gerber questions the freak show as a legitimate performance founded on the willing participation of the disabled people to display themselves as spectacles arguing that "[freaks] had little, if any choice in giving their consent to the social arrangements into which they were born" (40-41). Notwithstanding, Garland turns the freak show into a social space of self-representation and self-assertion for human oddities.

Mr Arroner's private show room stands as an enfreakment of the drawing-room using it as a semi-public space to stage the liminality of Eve. Drawing on the spectators' knowledge of the structural organisation of the home, the class-bound codes of manners and the ascribed gender roles, Mr Arroner uses the familiar to enhance the strange in Eve's character. During these performances Eve plays along the script and guidelines her husband directs. Here, Garland uses the nineteenth-century freak discourse and

specific pattern of representation in Mr Arroner's presentation of his wife following combining the exotic and aggrandised mode:[71]

> This unusual creature you see before you was brought into London at a great expense from the broad savannahs of Africa! From the establishment of a certain lady of such high position and royal connections that discretion does not permit me to elaborate further. (Garland 120)

In order to "cast the exhibit as a strange creature" in the eyes of the audience (Bogdan, *Freak Show* 97), Mr Arroner commences the act with highlighting Eve's animalistic features and exotic origin to frame her as the Lion-Faced Woman. Next, he manipulates the spectators' perception of femininity and respectability to contradict his previous assertion that she is an animal by instead presenting her as a respectable and refined woman. In a truly aggrandized mode of representation, Mr Arroner endows Eve with "status-enhancing characteristics" (Bogdan, *Freak Show* 97). She is instructed to remain seated with a book in her lap, dressed in the latest fashion of upper-class ladies and recite poetry by heart.

The animalistic image of Eve in combination with the stylised speech that asserts her respectability, femininity and class superiority represent a contradictory and ambiguous identity that plays upon the expectations of the audience of what is human and what is not,

> With each afternoon my husband's description of me grew more and more outlandish until I was transformed into a creature I barely recognised: I became 'morally uplifting; the most prodigious creature examined by Europe's leading men of Science and Philosophy; offered to the general populace for the further edification and education of Mankind'. (Garland 123)

[71] For a detailed description of different modes of representation used to staged divergent bodies in American side shows see Robert Bogdan's *Freak Show* (1988).

Voice, vision and subjectivity intertwine in the performance of freak identity, which represents a stance of speaking back to the Victorians. Notwithstanding, neo-Victorian undertakings to invest the freak with human status depend on a repetition of the very same freak-show discourse and it seeks to alter.

The visual encounter in the freak show comprehends a pronounced curiosity to behold human oddities, but it also represents a reflexive stance between the freak and the spectator that places the freak in the position of the observer. Eve's inner feelings are ventriloquised through Donkey-Skin: "*see how they struggle with pity, horror and amusement, she said. How terrified they would be if they looked into the mirror and saw you . . . you are what they fear they might truly be*" (Garland 123). The freak show is a social space where ordinary seeing fails, and the unexpected becomes the familiar. Rachel Adams argues that,

> instead of assuring dis-identification, in which the spectator recognises her difference from the body onstage, the sideshow is more often a space of identification, in which the viewer projects her own most hidden and perverse fantasies onto the freak and discovers them mirrored back in the freak's gaze. (7-8)

In this sense it is not only ordinary seeing that fails, but, in addition, I would propose that the gaze is superseded by the stare.

In this context, Craton points out that "the experience of the bodily spectacle opens a dialogue about both the nature of physical difference and whatever validating aspect of normative ideology. . . [the] audience [is] engaged in collective ideological negotiation" (36). Simultaneously, the observer inscribes cultural values on the strange body, the freak actor manifests a counterresponse to the audience's perception. This pinpoints the visual inquiry in the freak show as an interactive dialogue where the freak

is involved in the conception of his or her identity. Here, the freak or staree enters into dialogue with the starer that consists in a visual negotiation that attributes the freak on stage with agency: "What Eve has just said reverberates around my mind. It is true, under the eager eyes of the audience, I can act as lord of myself, even only for a few moments" (Garland 205).

Similarly, Barbara Chase-Riboud's retelling of the fate of Sara Bartman in *The Hottentot Venus: A Novel* (2002) refigures the woman behind the freak as well as performing it. Based on a true story and a real person Chase-Riboud's novel offers a touching and powerful account of African woman who was exploited by her husband-manager as a freak-show exhibit, stuffed and displayed after her death, removed from public view and hidden in a cellar for decades until being expatriated to South Africa in the twenty-first century. Her story follows the same pattern as Julia Pastrana's fate – the woman who has been the source of the inspirations to Eve (Pettersson, "Interview" n. pag.)[72]. Like Garland, Chase-Riboud reiterates the nineteenth-century freak discourse in her depiction of Sara Bartman as the Hottentot Venus and asserts her agency by incorporating her personal view on her enfreakment; "I could never understand how people saw me not I was but as what they, in their mind imagined me to be" (Chase-Riboud 165). I wish to make a point of how authors who depict female freaks coincide in the performers' inner wish to be seen as they are, as noted in Sara's voice. Similarly, the heroines of *Nights at the Circus* and *The Palace of Curiosities* address the reader in metafictional asides. Whereas Fevvers calls out "LOOK AT ME!" (Carter 13), Eve appeals to the reader "peel away this fur and I am as pink as you. The blood in my veins is as crimson. If you flay me, we stand equal. Beauty is skin-deep. We are all horrors under the skin" (Garland 22).

[72] Pettersson held an interview with Rosie Garland in Málaga in January 2014.

Eve's perception of her freak enactment is that she plays a role that does not contribute to her identity. In an attempt to make her husband see her as the woman she really is, she shaves off all hair with the hope to change his perception. Blair remarks how "[w]e alter the body to fit our self-perception and identity into the phallocentric cultural imagery that is invested with sexual difference" (Blair 201-02). Hair is a culturally rooted marker of gender difference, and Galia Ofek highlights how in the Victorian period "abnormal hairiness problematized a neat categorization of sex and gender traits" (57). In an interview Garland revealed that she is interested in the relationship between hair and femininity—she stated: "while hair on your head is perceived as feminine, bodily hair is seen as masculine, and what is more, these are taken as natural differences between the sexes albeit they are culturally inscribed" (Pettersson, "Interview" n. pag.).

This is something Garland takes up in the novel. Eve does not feel uncomfortable with her hairiness: "I want him. I would give it all up for a kiss: the house, the servant, the dresses, even the hats and fans. For him to take me in his arms, truly, as a man does his wife. For that, I would sacrifice my fur (Garland 128). As she has been taught by her mother that her physical condition is not socially acceptable she recurs to her mother's method to gain her husband's love, and shaves: "With the stroke of the razor I was turned into a girl, a real girl" (Garland 129). The act of shaving signals out the paradox of altering our physical appearance to be accepted for who we are. On the one hand, we recognise the performative essence of socially constructed categories as gender, and on the other hand, we cannot separate the body from the self, "the artificiality of making our attempts to make bodies meet social expectations, it also acknowledges the unbreakable connection between body and the self" (Craton 144). Her husband-manager cannot see beyond the identity he has created for Eve, and for

him she is mere object, a possession and a freak. Symbolically, Eve is absent from the narrative for a period of three months after this episode, the estimated time her fur would need to grow at full length again.

Upon her return we learn that Mr Arroner's freak show has expanded and Eve is no longer the sole freak performer in a domestic environment. He is now the owner of a troupe of freaks that are exposed as public spectacle and the representation of Eve has changed from being displayed as a gentleman's wife in a drawing-room setting to a public and titillating spectacle that appeals to voyeurism. Similar to Julia Pastrana's show, Eve's hirsutism and androgenous body undermines binary and stable gender categories. As Ofek notices:

> [t]he power of Pastrana to hunt men's imagination derived from the liminal nature of her hairiness, which challenged distinct borderlines between male and female anatomies, human and animal life, reflecting and feeding into Victorian concerns that such divisions between the sexes and between the species were not so clear. (57)

Nevertheless, Eve circumvents the objectifying practice of the freak show by combining it with music-hall dynamics. At this stage in her career, Eve's spectacle blends freak display with music-hall style and drawing on her life experience as a visual object she subverts the process of enfreakment. Blair suggests that "the actress's training as a woman in our society, habituated to conceiving of herself as an observed object . . . she is accustomed to think about her as a duality – the superficial exterior behaving as prescribed by men" (214). Eve fulfils the role of an actress and this progress in her life on stage gives room for a gendered negotiation of her role, and she destabilises power structures in her enactment by drawing on her life experience.

Mr Arroner's exposure of Eva as a scopophilic spectacle reduces her into the position of a titillating object for the male gaze. Moreover, reminiscent of Mulvey's "to-be-looked-at-ness" (11), he concieves her as an erotic spectacle and stylises her figure as a female freak onto which the male gaze projects its fantasy, which enhaces the idea of the visual pleasure of the female body. Notwithstanding, Eve is capable of evading the objectifying male gaze and to defy her husband's attempt to reduce her into a passive object of scopophilic desire by changing the script Mr Arroner has drawn up for her. Focalised through Abel, the only character in novel who sees Eve as a woman posits the reader in an angle that envisions her as an active agent. Consequently, the reader is presented with two ways of looking that foreground two ways of responding to the spectacle:

> I see how modestly she endeavours to veil her downy breasts, for they are in danger of toppling out of the neckline of her dress. It is cut at Mr Arroner's insistence: 'To add a bit of piquancy,' as he puts it. A man at the front cries, 'Go on love, a bit more leg!' She smiles at the audience, her teeth clamped together, and declines to accommodate the request. There is a growing chorus of wolfish howls. 'Show us your knees!' . . . She promenades from right to left and back again, singing a pretty ballad about her true love, who is a dear sweet boy and surely will return to her at any moment. 'It's singing!' laughs one wag. 'Miaowing, more like!' pipes up another. . . . She pauses and stands with her fists on her hips, taping her foot, as though considering conundrum. Then she twirls her moustache and throws the crowd a wink . . . 'I'm your own, your very own puss' instead of 'your very own girl' . . . with a miaow or two for good measure. . . . The men who have hooted at her are now struck dumb. Then the

> laughter begins . . . as they celebrate her cleverness in bending the tune at her will. (Garland 203-04)

Eve adverts the audience's attention to her enactment in a true music-hall fashion using direct address, gestures and knowingness, and as a consequence converts the gaze into staring.

In her study of disability in *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006) Arias holds that albeit the disabled body is situated in a vulnerable and inferior position "there is always a space of defiance" ("(In)Visible Disability" 357).[73] Eve resists subordination as she rejects her husband's script which frames her as a passive object for the male gaze. Conversely, she takes control of the spectacle by articulating her own voice and asserting agency on stage. As Garland-Thomson contends "this ocular gesture of dominance acts out the gendered asymmetries of patriarchy . . . [l]aden with sexual desire, predation, voyeurism, intimidation, and entitlement" (40). When Eve takes control of the stage and produces the spectacle herself she is in a face-to-face situation and addresses the audience through the communal vocabulary of the eyes, answering back to what they believe she is, means, or wants. Voice, vision and subjectivity converge in Eve's performance as the gaze is replaced by the stare. Her appropriation of the stage pinpoints "[the] potentially artful and productive roles starees take in the active meaning making of staring" (Garland-Thomson 96). Significantly, the instance is seen through the eyes of Abel who observes how Eve makes parody of the audience's view of her as an animal through laughter and subsequently negotiates her humanity on the stage. As the reader sides with Abel's perspective Eve's enactment represents a stance of speaking back to the Victorians criticising them for exploitative, objectifying and dehumanising practice of the freak show.

[73] Although Arias adopts a different approach to disability in her article her comment is significant as she alerts attention to the potential use of the stare.

Mr Arroner's male objectification and commodification of Eve culminates in conjugal rape, which combines his personal interest of making profit from her body with domestic violence. On the cue, "'What we need is a litter', he slurred", he violates his wife with the aim of getting her pregnant, and as a result, breed a freak of his own: "I am your husband. Look at you. Look at the wife I choose. An animal. Business made me do this. This is not what I want. This is work" (Garland 294). By forcing himself upon her he exerts physical and psychological violence over Eve and this assault stands as the ultimate exertion of dominance and control over her body. While he deprives her of free will, the right to her own body and dignity displaying her as freak, by violating his wife he inflicts both physical and emotional damage on Eve. Duncan notes that "the private home has historically been seen as a place where men have assumed their right to sexual intercourse" ("Renegotiating Gender" 130), and Mr Arroner exerts his spousal right to do with his wife as he pleases. This act of violence incites the ethical involvement of the reader as it envisions the husband's right to his wife's body and consent theories that mislay the blame on the victim. Marital rape problematises choice and consent in legal, moral and social dimensions and Eve holds a unique social position as marginalised and victimised by her husband-manager. The questions raised regarding her consent and volition parallels her situation as freak with her social position as wife.

Although I primarily focus on female figures, attention must be given Abel as his character is central to the way we read Eve as a freak and his voice is key to uncover the underlying critical agenda of this novel. Garland adds magic realism to the novel with the character of Abel who cannot die and possesses no memory, which evokes the myth of Saint Lazarus (and Abel), and shows traits of a rare psychiatric disorder known

as dissociative fugue or the fugue state.[74] The difficulty to determine his identity lies in the opposition between his immortality and human characteristics. At the same time as he is portrayed as a human being with physical appearance of one, his unnatural powers contradicts his humanity. Abel's constant self-reflective endeavour to assert his identity imitates the rhetoric of the Victorian freak show:

> I hide a great secret, one that marks me as grotesque. Am I man or animal? I can no longer call myself either: I do not have the comfort of calling myself beast, for a beast can be butchered for the use of mankind, and I can not serve any such purpose. Nor can I say that I am a man, for no man can do what I have done: cut myself and heal, against nature. It is terrifying. It raises hopes towards understanding only to dash them most cruelly. It thrills and humiliates me. What kind of creature am I? I have no answer. (Garland 49)

From outset, the reader is lured into the search for his identity to find out who or what he is. While Eve's otherness resides in her assumed hybridity between mankind and animal, Abel's strangeness, or monstrosity, lies in his unnatural corporeality. In either case, their characters simultaneously elicit responses of rejection and recognition. Accordingly, the enfreakment of Eve and Abel also involves "a nature/culture split" that represents the dilemma of determining on the freak status of the observed as "some monsters are natural where others are not" (Shildrick 10).

This is clearly manifested the moment Abel and his companion Alfred, who struggles with his queer desires for Abel, gets hold of a playbill of Eve "The non-Pareil of the Female Sex" (Garland 101). Butler stresses how regulatory norms of 'sex' work

[74] The fugue state is a neurological disorder that is related to other psychiatric conditions of identity-dissociative disorders. It involves selective amnesia of identity, personal memories and personality. It can last from a few hours up months or even longer and is generally as reversible state. The fugue state generally involves travelling and even the establishment of a new identity. Seemingly normal people suddenly disappear without warning to establish a new identity without any memory of their former lives or reappear without any memory of where they have been. For instance, Dr Andrew Norman relates Agatha Christie's eleven-days disappearance in 1926 to the fugue state. For further details see Norman's biography *Agatha Chrsitie: The Finished Portrait* (2007).

in a performative fashion to constitute "the fixity of the body", and contends that, the materialisation of sexual difference is restrained within the frame of heterosexuality conditions "the way [we] understand 'gender' as a cultural construct" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 2-3). Alfred defines Eve as a freak because she fails to meet his expectations of female corporeality and here Garland brings forth issues regarding gender identity. Alfred defines femininity according to the materialisation of the gendered body within fixed parametres of sexed, i.e. biological, difference, and concludes that she is a freak as she fails to meet his expectations of what a woman in terms of biological and cultural difference:

> 'She is a woman. But not the same as any other.' [Alfred] hoots, slaps his thighs. 'You never said a truer word! What a freak!' 'She is different.' I do not mirror his smile. 'Oh come on Abel. Humour me. A bear is a bear and can't help stinking. A female should be female. Not something halfway inbetween, like that.' He stabs a finger into the playbill. But I am different also,' I say. 'Is that what you think of about me? A freak?' We stare at each other for [a long] time . . . [Alfred] casting his eyes about. 'Don't take on so, Abel. Only joking'. (Garland 101)

Alfred situates questions of humanity on the axis of gender in his description of Eve as a freak and fails to recognise Abel's similarities to Eve. He is the only one in the narrative who never questions Eve's humanity as his character holds the same inbetween status as she. By interlocking Alfred in a stare, Abel places the corporeal limits of subjectivity under tension to assert his own status as human or freak. Subsequently, Abel's questions bring Alfred's queer desire to the forefront, which in turn pinpoints the social construction of gender identity.

The author combines Eve's narrative with Abel's, whose story manifests elements of magic realism. As Patricia Waugh notes, "characters suddenly realise that they do not exist, cannot die, have never been born . . . [or] starts to perform impossible acts" (91). The tensions between the real and the fantastic, between human and freak, are particularly marked in Abel's macabre performance during which he appears on stage in the role of the "the non-descript . . . The man with no name! The man without history!" (Garland 164). He displays his unnatural capacity to self-heal by self-inflicting severe injuries on his half-naked body. The peculiar mode of magic realism unsettles our ideas about what is real, what is not, and Abel's unnatural power to self-heal raises the questions is human or is he not? But Abel's performance is not a mere freak enactment and in contrast to Eve's stylised performance of a freak identity, Abel is the same man on and off the stage; The man without history, the man who cannot die. On the one hand, he embodies the loss of memory, suffering from amnesia and possesses no short-term memory, and on the other hand, he is immortal. The conflation between supernatural features and the human view we get of him unsettles reality and vision. Our attempt at reading him as a text and identify him as human or non-human is analogous with the epistemogical speculation of the freak show and is further entranced in our own desire to make sense of ourselves by comparing us with the other. Consequently, the reader adopts the same perspective as the freak-show spectator who stares at the human oddity on display reading Abel the very same way the Victorians beheld the freak on stage.

The position of the reader-as-observer is central to the novel, and Garland draws the reader into a speculative game that destabilises the borders between real/fictional human/non-human, us/them spectator/observer. The narrator engages the reader in a self-reflective reading reminiscent of the visual dynamics of the freak show: the

contemporary starer (reader) is caught up in an act of negotiation of the human/non-human identity of Victorian staree (freak character). And in this sense, as Heilmann and Llewellyn argue, "the text become[s] almost a glass permitting a double-viewed reflection" (144). Their concept of the text as a mirror is not an isolated assertion, and whereas Heilmann and Llewellyn evoke the neo-Victorian text as a looking glass, Craton holds that "the fictional body *is* a looking glass. It gives us an image to contemplate and analyse, to judge or desire, but also points those judgements back at our own bodies and changes the way we understand ourselves" (Craton 210). The mirror metaphor is potential to neo-Victorianism as it highlights its self-reflective and visual aspects of the neo-Victorian texts.

As mentioned in chapter 4, several critics have utilised Jonathan Loesberg's term "binocular narrative . . . [, which] explicitly makes us aware of seeing the Victorian period from a contemporary standpoint, and seeing the Victorians as they would not see themselves, rather than reproducing them for our spectacle" (363), to support their arguments of the performativity of neo-Victorianism. Gamble (2007), and more recently, Arias (2103)[75] stress the relevance of duality, doubling and vision in neo-Victorian novels. As Arias and Pulham put it, "[l]ooking backwards to the Victorian period . . . provid[es] nuanced readings and interpretations of the Victorian age and our own contemporary period" (xxv). The performative characteristic of neo-Victorian literature is central to my argument as authors who turn to freak-show environments deploy the trope of theatricality at several levels to bring a self-reflection to the forefront. Several analogies between the neo-Victorian retrieval of human exhibits and the Victorian freak show can be drawn. Of course, the inherent revisionary

[75] Arias's paper "Rereading the Victorian Past through the Body: Neo-Victorian Fiction and the Senses in Fiona Shaw's *The Sweetest Thing*" explored the link between the past and the present through the senses. It was delivered at the international seminar "Transactions and Connections: Memories of the Past in the European Context" held at the University of Malaga, 9-11 October 2013.

enterprise of neo-Victorian literature to recapture lost voices and reimagine marginalised people to retrieve them to memory is central to a novel such as *The Hottentot Venus: A Novel*, which clearly commemorates the fate of Sara Bartman. Notwithstanding, I propose that there is something more to neo-Victorian reworkings of the Victorian freak show than to rescue the human behind the freak from historical oblivion in order to attribute them a story and an identity of their own.

The performative mode of neo-Victorian literature involves an epistemological speculation as we infer our knowledge of the Victorians, on the one hand in a historical context, and on the other, in a literary context. Gamble argues that the performative potential emerges in the "the self-conscious exercise in looking backwards" at a both a historical era and a literary period (128). Paradoxically, neo-Victorian revisionary projects impel authors to reconstruct the very same stereotyped image of the Victorians they set out to deconstruct. Under these circumstances, authors and readers alike adopt a standpoint marked by superiority as we pass judgement on them from a contemporary perspective inferring present-day values onto a period that was culturally different form ours with the idea that we are more enlightened, fair and politically correct than the Victorians.

The speculative encounter that arises between the observer and the object under observation in contemporary recreations of the Victorian freak show is resonant of the Victorian freak-show practice of reading the divergent body. As I regard the reader-as-observer I evoke the Lacanian mirror image of the I/not-I as explored in this chapter to expand from the freak-show narrative to the self-reflective mode of neo-Victorian texts. In this context, I wish to highlight how the contemporary reader occupies the position of the I as he or she subjects the Victorian other into the position of not-I. In the same way we scrutinise the Victorians to find out how different they were from us, the backlash of

finding more similarities. In their analysis of paratextual elements of three neo-Victorian novels, *The Hottentot Venus* being one of them, Heilmann and Llewellyn proclaim that in making reference to freak-show icons "it also implicates us, the reader, in this appropriatory gaze, hinting at our own complicity in processes of objectification, and commodification" (114). This is a notion that applies to Garland's novel as well.

The author achieves a similar effect in *The Palace of Curiosities* as she, on the one hand accentuates the humanity of the freak characters by rendering the subjective response to their experiences, and on the other hand, complies the reader to intuitively pass judgement on these characters. In this vein, while we distance us from the perpetrators of freaks in the nineteenth century for deshumanising practices, denouncing them for lack of sensibility towards human beings and detestable treatment of physically different and visually strange, we occupy the same standpoint ourselves in looking back and scrutinising them. Nevertheless, Garland-Thomson points out how the shift in contemporary critical attention to human oddities puts stress on the individual arguing, "the virtue of [contemporary analyses] is that the freaks cannot be relegated to metaphorical figures of otherness, but rather they are enfleshed as they are enfreaked, always particular people in particular lives at particular moments in particular places" (Introduction xi). Garland achieves to assert Eve's and Abel's humanity by attributing them with voice and agency as they act as active performers in the spectacle of their deformities, yet, the author also engages with the reader's desire to categorise the characters according to fixed parameters of humanity and gender identity. Garland's narrative game of simultaneously defending Eve against the exploitative practices of the freak-show institution and sympathy for her when she suffers from objectification by her husband, also lures the reader into as speculative game of passing judgement over Abel.

The freak show has been a territory where scholars have found support for theories on the gaze and this mode of watching does apply to the objectifying dynamics of the visual evaluation of human oddities. Therefore, rather than rejecting the gaze, I alert attention to the risk of falling into the pitfall of objectifying practices. The visualisation of the human body is central to how we see ourselves and how we fit into society. The visual artist Alexa Wright's fascination with disabled bodies as portrayed in her photographs manifests her concern to "[diminish] the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', and [attempt] to force the viewer to locate him or herself as subject of the work as he or she is battles with these unreal, yet believable images . . .", (n. pag.).[76] Similarly, authors who regenerate the Victorian freak show and its rhetoric to transfigure freaks into human beings with voice and agency necessarily apply alternative modes of observance in order to recast them as active agents of selfhood, to which individual experience is central.

In these lines, Davies suggests that we need to rethink the passive/active dichotomy that the act of revoicing the Victorians implies (11). The scholar ponders on the question "what is at stake when additional voices enter into Victorian/neo-Victorian dialogue?" (Davies 11-12). The emphasis on voice in conjunction with vision is central to neo-Victorian freak narratives as they destabilise the passive/active dichotomy, and in lines with Davies argument, neo-Victorianism talks back to itself rather than talking back to the Victorians. Garland-Thomson remarks that the challenge in revisionary projects of freak studies is "to find the precise language to talk about freaks and their display that unsettles the way we understand freak as freakish, as far edge of human, an

[76] In her keynote lecture "Signs of Monstrousness: Bodies, Images and Imaginings" held at the 7th International Somatechnics Conference in Linköping, 2013, the British visual artist Alexa Wright spoke about her series of photographs entitled *I* (1998). The collection consist of eight digitally manipulated images which the artist has superimposed her face on the bodies of disabled women choreographed according to the Western ideal of femininity. During her talk, she explained that her aim was to eradicate the distance between the observer and the object as well as make the spectator reflect over disability and normalcy in relation to human value.

not 'us'" (Garland-Thomson, Introduction x). In *The Palace of Curiosities*, Garland manages to readdress the freak combing narrative strategies of voice and focalisation and in doing so engages the reader in act of staring. By reiterating the language of freak rhetoric to combine it with the subjectivity of the freak the author opens an interactive dialogue between the past and the present during which the Victorians assert agency and talk back at us. While condoning the Victorians for their view on the divergent people we tend to make the same judgement and evaluation of them, only to find more similarities than differences. In other words, the neo-Victorian freak show is a textual performance and a social space where agency, vision, and subjectivity intertwine in the specular encounter between the Victorians and us. The neo-Victorian performative mode transacts nineteenth-century enfreakment strategies onto the reader perspective, and in doing so establish a connection between the Victorians and us.

6. Conclusion

My main concern in this PhD thesis has been to uncover the process of spatialising of identity in neo-Victorian literature and to examine how space and gender converge in the formation of selfhood. My study of the centrality of the public/private dichotomy and its relevance to female urban experience has focused on the intersection of space, gender and spectacle through the concept of performativity in four neo-Victorian novels. Hence, the title, "Neo-Victorian Novels of Spectacle: Mapping Gendered Spaces in the City", endeavours to express the underlying visual and performative potential of neo-Victorian representations of gendered spaces. Space and gender are central to feminist revisionary projects of neo-Victorian literature, yet, there is a substantial gap regarding spatial theory in neo-Victorian studies. While gender is approached as a socially constructed category, the idea of space as a social construction has remained in the blind spot. Accordingly, the present study stands as an attempt to examine some of the key issues within this gap of spatial criticism in neo-Victorian literature.

The public/private dichotomy has traditionally been aligned with male/female and the outside/inside domestic realm. However, as social historians have demonstrated (Vicinus et al.), this binary division of separate and gendered spheres represents much more than two polarised spheres. Naturally, each one depends on the other and this has led to an overgeneralised juxtaposition of public and private spaces. However, this binary division has proved to be more than a duality: the two spheres overlap and boundaries are elastic and transparent, which also creates a third, liminal or threshold space in between. Still, the public/private dichotomy is enforced at the present in our

social consciousness and central to our mapping of social spaces, and as Janet Floyd contends:

> The plotting of inside and outside, interior and exterior, private and public have been and remain matters of profound critical importance. These distinctions structure the imagination and experience of the world. We can scarcely think about subjectivity, a social existence, or the disposition of power without inside and outside. But such terms are protean. (351)

Thereby the scope of the public/private dichotomy is comprehensive and offers a wide range of possible spaces and issues to explore. In section 2.2.2 "Space and Gender in Victorian Culture: The Public versus Private Dichotomy" I have described Victorian women in the context of the public/private ideology, and then, in chapter 3, I have regarded the public/private in terms of a widening sphere and porous dichotomy that was constantly being challenged, transgressed and subverted. I have focused on how women challenged the ideal of domesticity by appropriating a female space in the public sphere.

Subsequently, I have posed the question to what purposes authors today retrieves the nineteenth-century public/private dichotomy and clichéd images of the Victorian era in order to let twenty- and twenty-first century theories bear on the nineteenth century. I have found that the public/private ideology is reiterated for the purpose of revisionary projects. Gómez Reus and Usandizaga affirm:

> [women] have striven to find loopholes in the unwritten laws which have separated the constraining private domain of women from enticing public world of men. The endeavours of these women to enter areas from which they have been traditionally excluded either by visible or invisible walls, together with the

> literary representations of their attempts to negotiate, subvert, and appropriate these forbidden spaces. (19-20)

As argued previously, neo-Victorian literature engages with both a historical and a literary past, yet I have opted for a socio-historical perspective in order to narrow down my study to the fictional representation of female public and urban characters in the neo-Victorian novel. The public/private dichotomy is a cornerstone of both Victorian culture and neo-Victorian fiction, and, in this sense, this PhD thesis examines part of this wide and complex field of research. Therefore, rather than covering a gap, the present study opens up for new lines of investigation, which I will present at the end of this chapter.

As I have tried to show, women constantly transgressed social constraints and acquired both social and physical mobility, and the fictional works I have analysed encompass the *flâneuse*, the prostitute, the philanthropist, the music hall artist, the circus performer and freak show exhibit. As my discussion of the literary texts shows, contemporary authors turn to the neo-Victorian performative mode to address gender issues highlighting the self-reflective enterprise this constitutes, together with vision and voice. I have come up with the term "novels of spectacle", which has also given the name to the title of this thesis, to describe novels that connote performativity and are densely visual, and in this regard, the term is not limited to novels that evolve within the world of spectacle. This label implies performance, entertainment, vision and something that attracts attention, and as a result, novels of spectacle come to refer to those narratives that are underpinned by the inherent power dynamics and power structures of different modes of watching and establishes the perspective of the reader-as-observer. Thus, this justifies my decision to include Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* alongside three novels by women writers that evolve within the world of

spectacle, Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities*. These texts have been considered as novels of spectacle enhancing the prominence of visual features in the narratives. I have examined how female characters undergo the process of spatialising identity in each novel drawing on spatial criticism of Lefebvre, Habermas, de Certeau and Feminist Geography in the light of my findings from the socio-historical context. I have discussed each novel separately and arranged my analysis in chronological order and I have formulated several conclusions.

First, I have started with *Nights at the Circus* to argue that this novel is not only a precursor to neo-Victorianism, but also the first to discover the Victorian world of spectacle as a prolific space to explore gender issues. Thus, as such, its meaning has not been fully exhausted yet. Carter's portrayal of Fevvers, her shifting relationship to her audiences, as well as the relevance of entertainment spaces to the spatial contextualisation of her gender identity, is politically charged with a feminist agenda. Carter draws heavily on Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and the inherent power structures. In this regard, space, gender and vision are central to the heroine's subjective experience. Fevvers struggles to acquire full control over her self-representation visually and by narrating her own life story, she "take[s] advantage of the inherent subject/object structure in order to avoid complete domination or assert [her] subjectivity by self-representation through writing" (Merritt 16).

Nights at the Circus has received considerate critical attention, and has been regarded as a postmodern work. As demonstrated in my analysis of the novel, it is a neo-Victorian novel. Nevertheless, it is an example of the genre in its early stages before crystallising into a separate subgenre of historical fiction. In contrast to neo-Victorianism in the twenty-first century, which is pressing beyond the strife to rewrite

history from a feminist perspective, Carter's novel challenges Western patriarchal tradition by turning history into *her*story, hence, *Nights at the Circus* lies close to postmodern historiographic metafiction that questions "the truth claim" of history (Hutcheon 93). Samantha J Carroll points out that neo-Victorianism is foregrounded in postmodernism, "postmodern methods might unsettle, deconstruct, decentre, queer or trouble such seemingly adamantine categories as subjectivity, history, race, gender, sexuality or class, in an effort to reveal their purported 'origins' as narratively constructed" (Carroll 182), and, in this regard, *Nights at the Circus* is a novel that marks the passage from postmodernism towards something new.

Second, Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* takes on from what Carter started and situates her story about lesbian coming-out and in the Victorian era queering the past and also the *Bildungsroman*. The social production of space is central to the formation of gender identity and Waters explores different performative spaces as the music-hall, streets, drawing-room and political arena to portray gender, space but also history as performative in her lesbian reimagination of Victorian London.

While I have emphasised the theatrical features of *Nights at the Circus* by drawing a parallel between the novel's tripartite structure and a three-act play, I have connected the theatricality in *Tipping the Velvet* to Nan's relationship with the city as a spectacle. I have linked this to Nan's queer *Bildung* and her capacity to use theatrical strategies to gain access to the streets, as an actor and an observer, and argued that unlike her theatrical enactment, her social performance is inseparable from her identity. On the contrary, the idea of London as a stage is central to her lesbian identity, and her off-stage performances are clearly anchored in Butler's theories on gender performance. Therefore, I wish to emphasise that whereas Carter anticipates twenty-century theories of gender performance, Waters's hinges on Butlerian theories in the narrative.

Moreover, her coming-out and assertion of lesbian selfhood and coming out testify to late twenty- and early twenty-first century queer politics and spatial criticism that challenge the public and the private.

This is reflected in Nan's struggle to come to terms with her lesbian identity throughout the novel as she attempts to make meaning of her role in society and discover how that role contributes to her identity by enacting different roles in different social spaces—which I have analysed under the lens of Lefebvre's triadic notion of space as perceived, conceived and lived. This becomes evident in the final stage of the novel where Waters directs severe criticism towards Habermas's notion of the public sphere as a space designated to the interest of an all-inclusive society of individuals as opposed to the state, "the public of *private* individuals who join in debate of issues bearing on state authority" (Calhoun 7). Waters's highly politicised lesbian agenda follows in the vein of Lefebvre's criticism of Habermas. As mentioned in the Introduction, Lefebvre denounces that "political space . . . seeks to impose itself as a reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction" and exerts power over the individual (94). Breaking prolonged lesbian silence in official history, Waters writes lesbianism back into history asserting visibility, voice and agency in the character of Nan. Moreover, she disrupts heteronormative space by normalising queer identities by articulating the private in public.

Third, in contrast to the other three novels that are written by women writers and rely on the context of entertainment spaces, *The Crimson Petal and the White* is supported by the image of the city as spectacle and the author applies the trope of theatricality in his characterisation of the social climbing prostitute Sugar and the unconventional philanthropist Emmeline Fox. I have placed Faber's novel alongside the other works by Carter, Waters and Garland as they all focus on the spatialising of

identity in Victorian London and use the neo-Victorian performative mode in ways that enhance the visual and theatrical characteristics inherent to the city. Among the four novels under consideration, Faber's novel is the work that incorporates clichéd images of Victorian society and of the women in particular. Jeanette King has drawn attention to the fact that critics have questioned the feasibility of the ideology of separate spheres during the Victorian period and challenged the idea that women were confined to the home (11). The public/private dichotomy is central to *The Crimson Petal and the White* as Faber stages the double lives of different characters.

As noted in chapter 4, the prostitute is frequently fictionalised in neo-Victorian literature and authors are concerned with attributing these women respectability and dignity. I have proposed in chapter 3 that the prostitute and the philanthropist are two liminal figures whose paths intertwine and a parallel reading of these two characters gives insight into how women from different classes gained access to the public sphere—an urban experience that stimulated a feeling of independence and freedom. However, in neo-Victorian literature the figure of the female philanthropist is scarce, and I have only encountered her together with the prostitute in *The Crimson Petal and the White*.[77] I have focused on how Sugar maps out London in terms of a theatre, enacting different roles different spaces and gains insight into the underlying power structure of Victorian norm as she climbs the social ladder. She performs different roles of stereotyped femininity in private spaces, as a prostitute, courtesan and governess while public spaces are connected to modernity and roles as a *flâneuse*, or finally as a single mother. Space and gender converge in her subjective response to the city, and her

[77] Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* is a fictionalisation of the Victorian philanthropist Emily Faithful, yet the figure of prostitute does not appear in this novel. Donoghue has written a novel about a prostitute in the eighteenth century, *Slammerkin*, yet, she does not mention any philanthropist in this novel. Writers tend to treat these figures separately.

knowledge of the social space enables to navigate between the public and private realms, as well as to move between slum areas and respectable middle-class spaces.

Similarly, the middle-class widow, Emmeline Fox, has gained freedom and independence in the role as a philanthropist within the charity movement. Several instances in the novel reveal that Mrs Fox's involvement in the Rescue Society is based on something else than altruistic endeavour. This proto-feminist rejoices in having access to the public spaces of the city and derives a sense of freedom and independence from venturing out into the city. Mrs Fox's unwillingness to remarry and her insistence on working within the charity movement is also a way for her to avoid what Massey describes as "the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere . . . both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control of identity" (179).

The way these women map out female spaces in the streets of London that contribute to their selfhood outside the public/private dichotomy and this underscores the concept of geometrical space as an empty container to be filled. Moreover, as overlapping social spaces these female urban strollers "[open] up possibilities radically different from the traditional and 'transparent' spatialities associated with patriarchal accounts of gender as a stable, natural, mutually exclusive binary distinction between 'Man' and 'Woman'" (Bondi and Davidson 21). Their interaction with the city, different roles, subjective experience and search for selfhood outside the public/private dichotomy connote space as socially constructed category.

Finally, *The Palace of Curiosities* places the Victorian freak show at the core of the narrative and Garland is concerned with issues of gender, space and identity. On the one hand, the author uses magic realism in a similar vein as Carter, in her portrayal of the protagonists Eve and Abel. On the other hand, her treatment of gender is closer to Waters, especially in the character of Abel. Garland adds a third category to prior

feminist and queer inquiries into the neo-Victorian world of spectacle adding the issue of what means to be human. Although both Eve and Abel raise questions regarding these topics, I have focused on Eve to find out how the freak show is a contrasting space of representation and interpretation of Victorian womanhood. Garland's treatment of the freak performer bears on twenty-first century critical perspectives on the Victorian freak show. As discussed in section 3.2.3, the current trend in freak studies is to situate the human exhibit as an active agent in the spectacle of deformity and pay heed to subjective experience of the human on display. I have drawn attention to the need to apply a different mode of watching than the objectifying gaze and proposed the stare as a feasible critical tool to explore the spatialising of identity within the freak show.

Garland turns to the freak-show environment to deploy the trope of theatricality at several levels and brings self-reflection to the forefront. The Lacanian imagery of the I/not-I is embedded in the narrative, and as Heilmann and Llewellyn have proved, the mirror imagery is central to the neo-Victorian mode as the narrative represents a self-conscious reflexive *and* reflective stance between the Victorians and us (144). This culminates in Garland's neo-Victorian enfreakment of Eve and Abel as the author ensnares the reader into a speculative game of asserting human identity to the characters. In this regard, *The Palace of Curiosities* stands as a textual performance rather than a looking glass, that creates a social space where agency, vision, and subjectivity intertwine in the specular encounter between the Victorians and us.

To conclude, the four novels under analysis all work consciously with the ideological conflicts and tensions of the public/private dichotomy as well as Victorian heteropatriarchal normativity. Accordingly, this PhD thesis has made an attempt to answer the question for what purpose contemporary authors reiterate the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. I have explored the relationship between space and gender

in the spatialising of identities, and successfully proved that neo-Victorian re-imaginations of Victorian women who transgressed gendered restrictions are sustained by evidence presented by historians. Social historians have demonstrated that women were not as confined as previously believed, and today we are familiar with the alternative view of Victorian society by shifting focus to inclusion rather than exclusion to challenge the exorbitant overgeneralisation that all Victorian women held an equally confined position in society.

Central to this is also the concept of the reader-as-observer and neo-Victorian literature evokes the idea of the novel as a theatrical spectacle for the reader. I have proposed the term "novels of spectacle" as it encompasses the visual and performative features that, in my opinion, are so central to the neo-Victorian mode. Several modes of watching have been examined: from subverting the objectifying male gaze in *Nights at the Circus* to creating a fissure in hetrenormative space through the queer ga(y)ze in *Tipping the Velvet*, subsequently I have moved on to the detached position of *flâneur* and concluded with the interactive dynamics of the stare. As far as Carter, Waters and Garland are concerned, the underlying power structures of the different modes of watching have been an essential part to the heroines subjective experience of gendered spaces and formation of identity, and this has become evident through the authors' use of the world of spectacle as setting. The visual aspects of Faber's novel stand in direct relation to his theatrical representation of London as a spectacle and the notion of the reader-as-observer, which I have compared to the *flâneur*'s gaze. In this regard, the four works are novels of spectacle.

Gamble has noted the performative potential of looking backwards into both a historical era and a literary period (128), and thus, neo-Victorianism, as a field of studies, invites for inquires into nineteenth-century society and its literature and how we

relate to it. Whereas my study of the public/private dichotomy in neo-Victorian literature has concentrated on the public sphere, and I wish to highlight that the domestic realm is an equally potential area of research. I have drawn on Cheryl A Wilson on several occasions as well as Despotopoulou and stressed how the drawing-room is invaded by the public realm as it was aimed at display. I have touched upon this theme in *Nights at the Circus*, *Tipping the Velvet* and *The Palace of Curiosities* as the female protagonist all on some occasion perform for an audience in a domestic setting. For future research, the spiritualist séance and mesmerism would provide a fruitful topic, as these were public performances enacted in domestic spaces. Moreover, Janet Stobbs's study of the Victorian courtroom as an in-between space presents a third dimension to the public/private dichotomy as it stands as an in-between space where the private becomes public. Finally, as I have argued in chapter 4, the world of spectacle has undergone a prolific growth in the twenty-first century and is worthy of attention on its own. As I have remarked previously, the majority of neo-Victorian novels that turn to entertainment spaces are written by women writers who situate the social construction of space and gender at the heart of the narrative. As stated in the Introduction, the main premise in this doctoral thesis has been to investigate how female subjectivity is proportionally informed by space and gender. Socially constructed categories as space and gender converge, on the one hand, in the social production of space, and on the other hand, in the formation of subjectivity. As I hope to have demonstrated, women challenge, destabilise and dissolve spatial boundaries as they map out gendered spaces in the city.

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8. Appendix

Appendix

Plate 1: The Oxford Music Hall

Plate 2: Canterbury Music Hall (1856)

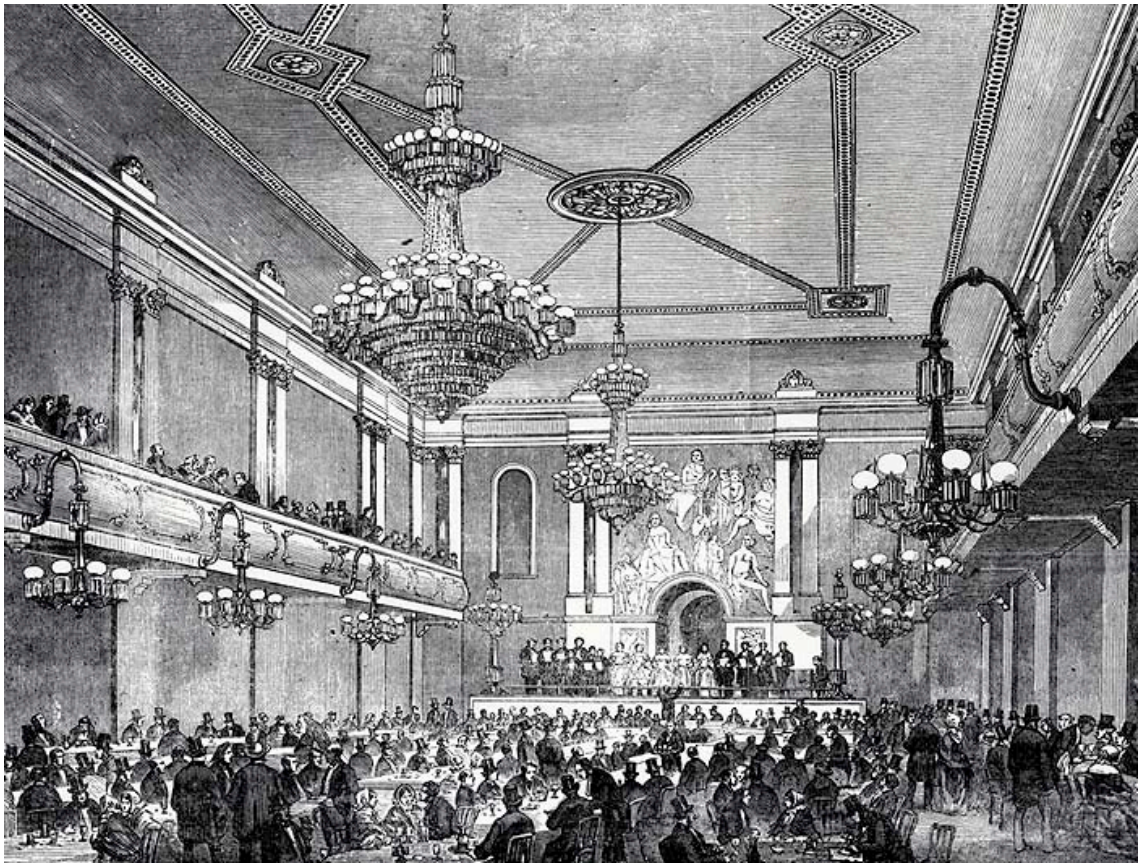

Plate 3: Zaeo

Plate 4: Julia Pastrana and her son

Plate 5: Stephan Bribowski, alias Lionel: The Lion-Faced Man.